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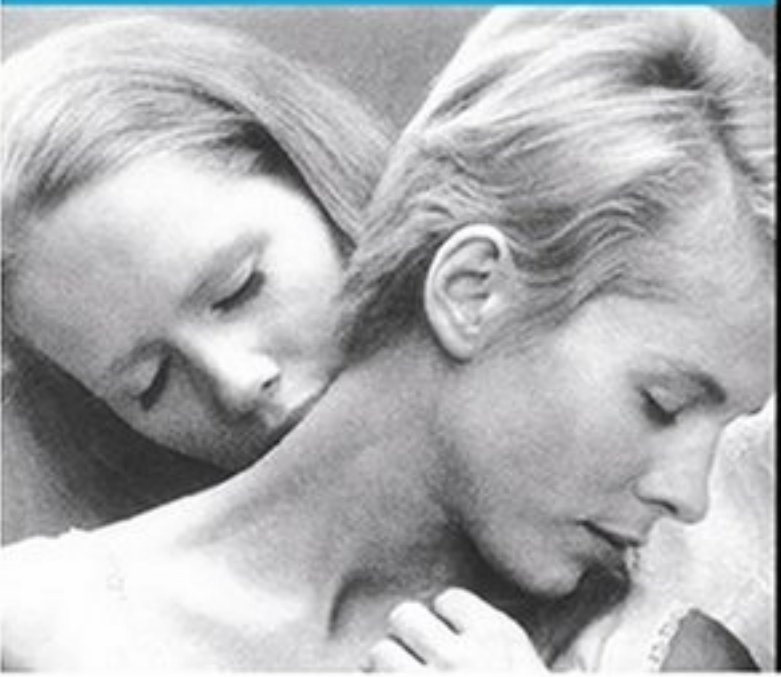
Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*

Edited by
Lloyd Michaels



CAMBRIDGE FILM HANDBOOKS

Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*

Long held to be among the world's greatest filmmakers, Ingmar Bergman shaped international art cinema from the 1950s to the 1980s. Among his many works, *Persona* is often considered to be his masterpiece and is described as one of the central works of modernism. Bergman himself claimed that this film "touched wordless secrets only the cinema can discover." The essays collected in this volume, published for the first time anywhere, use a variety of methodologies to explore topics such as acting technique, genre, and dramaturgy. It also includes translations of Bergman's early writings that have never before been available in English, as well as an updated filmography and bibliography that cover the filmmaker's most recent work.

Lloyd Michaels is Professor of English and Dean of the College at Allegheny College, Pennsylvania. Editor of *Film Criticism,* he is also the author of *Elia Kazan: A Guide to References and Resources* and *The Phantom of the Cinema: Character in Modern Film.*

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Each CAMBRIDGE FILM HANDBOOK is intended to focus on a single film from a variety of theoretical, critical, and contextual perspectives. This "prism" approach is designed to give students and general readers valuable background and insight into the cinematic, artistic, cultural, and sociopolitical importance of individual films by including essays by leading film scholars and critics. Furthermore, these handbooks by their very nature are meant to help the reader better grasp the nature of the critical and theoretical discourse on cinema as an art form, as a visual medium, and as a cultural product. Filmographies and selected bibliographies are added to help the reader go further on his or her own exploration of the film under consideration.

Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*

Edited by

LLOYD MICHAELS

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In memory of my parents,
Maybelle and Jack P. Michaels

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Finally, and perhaps gratuitously, I would like to acknowledge the enduring work of Ingmar Bergman, whose films inspired my earliest interest in the aesthetic potential of the cinema. Artists of his talent, discipline, and achievement should never be taken for granted.

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Lloyd Michaels is Professor of English and Dean of the College at Allegheny College, where he has taught courses in literature and film since 1972. For the past twenty-three years he has edited *Film Criticism,* the third oldest film journal in continuous publication in America. He is the author of *Elia Kazan: A Guide to References and Resources* (G.K. Hall) and *The Phantom of the Cinema: Character in Modern Film* (SUNY). His articles and reviews have appeared in *Film Quarterly, Screen, Post-Script, University of Toronto Quarterly, Cinema nuovo,* and he has contributed essays to *Magill's Survey of Cinema* and *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmaking.*

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LLOYD MICHAELS

Bergman and the Necessary Illusion

AN INTRODUCTION TO *PERSONA*

I. SCENES FROM A MOVIE

1. The darkness of the movie theater is suddenly illuminated on screen by the flash of light from the projector arc, followed by a shot of film leader running through the machine. Images of unrelated figures – an animated cartoon, close-ups of hands, a spider, an eye, animal entrails – alternate with blinding reflections of white light off the empty screen, accompanied by abstract sounds. After the shocking close-up of a human hand with a spike driven through it, the picture dissolves into a montage of wintry scenes and of aged faces, apparently corpses, as we become aware of the sound of dripping water and then a distant ringing. The close-up of an elderly woman viewed upside down suddenly cuts to the same shot with the crone's eyes now wide open. A strange-looking boy lying under a sheet slowly awakens, puts on glasses, and begins reading a book, only to be disturbed by the presence of the camera, which he tentatively reaches out toward to touch. A reverse shot reveals the object of his attention to be a huge, unfocused still of a woman's face; this image gradually shifts to the close-up of what seems to be another woman, one who closely resembles the first. The boy's extended hand traces the elusive figure, separated from him by the screen, as the sound track becomes high pitched and intrusive. The titles begin – PERSONA/EN FILM AV INGMAR BERGMAN – separated by a series of nearly subliminal shots, some of them recognizable, others obscure, while the sound track intensifies the effect through percussive drums and xylophone. The movie's story, set in a hospital room, begins. (6½ minutes; nearly 60 shots)

2. Sister Alma, a nurse, relates to Elisabet Vogler, an actress and her patient, the story of a past sexual misadventure: she had once participated with a friend in an erotic coupling with two very young boys on a beach. She then had sex that evening with her fiancé, the most pleasurable lovemaking during their long engagement. Shortly thereafter, Alma discovered she was pregnant and decided to abort the child. While she recalls this intensely sensual experience, the camera remains within the bedroom, alternating between close-ups of the nurse's face and that of the impassive listener who resembles her. Elisabet, wearing a similar white nightdress, reclines on the bed smoking and remaining silent throughout the scene as Alma fidgets in her chair, paces across the room, lights a cigarette, and finally collapses into the other woman's arms. (nearly 7 minutes; 10 shots)

3. The same two women, now dressed in black turtlenecks, sit across a table confronting each other. Alma describes in menacing detail the pregnancy and mothering impulses of Elisabet, who again remains silent during the entire account. Mrs. Vogler had felt incomplete because her friends said she lacked "motherliness" and so conceived a child whom she grew to hate even before it was born. Despite her "cold and

indifferent" attitude toward her son, whom she had wished dead and now finds repellent, the boy loves her with total devotion. The monologue begins with a two-shot of Alma speaking in the foreground darkness, back to camera, with Elisabet facing her and the camera; as it proceeds, the shot dissolves into two successive close-ups of Elisabet's face, her left side (right side of the frame) brightly lit, the other side in darkness. After Alma's indictment concludes ("You think he's repulsive, and you're afraid"), the scene begins over again, the speech recited verbatim, this time with the camera repositioned so that Elisabet is now in the left foreground darkness, back to the camera, while Alma, half lit from the left, is seen in close-up. As the monologue reaches its climax for the second time, however, the dark side of her face is briefly transformed into half of Elisabet's face, which then disappears as Alma cries, "Nay!" But within moments, the strange close-up returns and remains, a composite of the two "bad sides" of the actresses' faces, as the silence is disturbed by a single dissonant chord. (8 minutes; 11 shots)

These three sequences, comprising one-fourth of the film's total running time, may serve to introduce the enduring artistic

achievement of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*. Utterly original at the time of the film's first release and virtually unrepeated in any movie since, they each offer a unique cinematic experience, one that is simultaneously mysterious and beautiful. The opening sequence, for example, goes beyond simply establishing certain images that figure prominently later in the narrative (hands, a rocky beach, upside-down faces) or presenting, as Bergman himself describes it, "a poem about the situation in which *Persona* had originated."[1] By alternating brilliant whiteness and sharply contrasting dark images in a rapid montage (particularly in the credits), the film recapitulates the ontology of the cinema itself – literally immersing the audience in the "flicks" that bring life out of darkness in the expectant movie theater. A careful scrutiny of the body language of spectators during the "beach orgy" sequence will confirm the authority of Bergman's conjuring art. Without resorting to flashbacks or cutaways, without removing a stitch of clothing from either of the beautiful women in the frame, he creates one of the most intensely erotic moments in the history of the

cinema. I have observed a class of unsophisticated students, many of them watching their very first "art film," lean forward, lips parted, bodies absolutely still as they take in this scene, faintly disturbed by its lesbian undertones but totally absorbed by the unanticipated urgency of the events both described and witnessed as well as their lasting consequences. By the time these same students come to the film's equally celebrated "double monologue," after frequently expressing an audible gasp (or groan) of recognition at Bergman's experimental device, they immediately concentrate on comprehending the nuances of the repeated tale and its shattering final close-up. Few of these undergraduates are prepared to interpret *Persona* immediately after its conclusion, but fewer still remain unmoved or unwilling to embark on a discussion of its significance.

The puzzled, tentative quality of these initial classroom discussions can also be found in the contemporary reviews of *Persona* by some of America's most literate critics. Although generally praising the film, they tend to shy away from definitive interpretation, preferring instead to describe its sensory effects and to hazard some speculations as to their possible meaning. More thorough "readings" of the text emerged later, but no less an authority than Peter Cowie, Bergman's biographer, has declared (somewhat hyperbolically), "Everything one says about *Persona* may be contradicted; the opposite will also be true."[2] Perhaps encouraged by this critical license, dozens of fascinated viewers, including myself, have scrutinized the haunting images that comprise the film's eighty-four minutes in order to produce partial explications of what continues to be "one of the most complex films ever made."[3]

II. THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF *PERSONA*

From the moment of its American release in 1967, *Persona* has been considered among Bergman's masterpieces; indeed, many critics regard it as "one of this century's great works of art."[4] The influential French journal *Cahiers du cinéma* has called it Bergman's "most beautiful film," and an international panel of

critics and scholars polled by the British magazine *Sight and Sound* has ranked it among the ten greatest films of all time. Ratings and reputation aside, *Persona* certainly stands today as one of the supreme examples of *modernist* art the cinema has yet produced. Like the central works of modernism in other forms – Picasso's cubist paintings, Pirandello's plays, Eliot's "The Waste Land," Joyce's *Ulysses* – it exhibits the qualities of fragmentation, self-reflexivity, and ambiguity associated with the movement that came into prominence at the beginning of the century while retaining a spirit of experimentation that makes it still seem "a film in search of its own laws."[5] At the same time, Bergman's trust in the integrity of his own intense vision along with his technical mastery of the medium at this stage of his filmmaking career raises *Persona* to a new level of accomplishment, "modernism becoming classical before our very eyes."[6]

Despite the evident cultural status of *Persona,* surprisingly little has been written about the film during the past decade. Several reasons account for this recent neglect. The first is probably the spate of excellent analyses produced relatively soon after its enshrinement in the modern canon, beginning with Susan Sontag's remarkable review essay included in the present volume. John Simon's *Ingmar Bergman Directs* selected *Persona* along with three other Bergman films for close analysis, deciphering shot by shot the self-referential allusions of the prologue and providing a formalist analysis of the film's narrative structure. Bruce Kawin's *Mindscreen* tackled the question of point of view, defining *Persona*'s subjectivity in terms of psychological processes related to self-conscious narration. And Paisley Livingston examined the film as an extension of Bergman's ongoing concern with the role of the artist in *Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art.* The scope and intellectual rigor of these critical works seem to have inhibited current scholars – Robin Wood's reassessment of his own earlier auteurist study of Bergman, an article cited by some of the authors in this collection, remains a notable exception – from undertaking new appraisals of *Persona.* Another reason may be political: Following his retirement from filmmaking after *Fanny and Alexander* (1983)

and with the ascendancy of *post*modernism (for which Quentin Tarantino has become a cinematic poster boy), Bergman has come to be regarded as a conservative artist of the somewhat devalued humanist tradition. Against the preference for mask and gesture found in postmodernist narrative, Bergman, despite the title of this film,[7] has chosen to focus on the *face* and the existentialist necessity for willed *action* of the sort commended by Eliot in the last lines of "The Waste Land." Although few younger critics would deny the achievement of the body of his work, not many seem interested in exploring the gravitas of his cinematic vision for a new generation. Moreover, the European art cinema that had originally nourished him and of which Bergman became the supreme exemplar, has steadily declined since his own retirement. In a related development, the various directions that academic film studies have taken in the past twenty years – toward non-Western cinema, studio history, queer theory, and B-film production, among others – have not seemed conducive to continued examination of "essentialist" films like *Persona.* That is, until now.

The original essays anthologized here reflect a number of new critical approaches to the film, exploring such relatively ignored areas as genre, dramaturgy, female sexuality, and acting technique. Christopher Orr's analysis of the melodramatic elements and Brechtian influences in *Persona,* for example, serves to refute Andrew Sarris's contention, still widely held, that Bergman is "essentially an artist in an ivory tower in an isolated country"[8]; Gwendolyn Foster provides insight into the relations between the two women through a feminist psychoanalytic vocabulary unavailable to the critical discourse of an earlier generation. Collectively, these new essays suggest that much productive work remains to be done on not just *Persona* but the entire canon of this remarkable filmmaker's long career.

III. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF INGMAR BERGMAN

Along with near contemporaries Federico Fellini, Luis Buñuel, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Akira Kurosawa, as well as

the younger Nouvelle Vague directors François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Alain Resnais, Ingmar Bergman helped shape the international art cinema for more than thirty years until his retirement with *Fanny and Alexander.* Since then, through his continuing career directing for the stage and writing screenplays, memoirs, and personal reflections, as well as recent retrospectives of his films as major cultural events in New York and Stockholm, he has come to be seen as one of the monumental artists of the second half of the twentieth century. Although it is only fair to acknowledge that he is presently somewhat out of favor among many younger scholars, his contributions to the art of cinema remain fundamentally unchallenged:

1. Bringing intellectual content and the emotional force of language to the screen. Bergman's were among the very first screenplays to be regularly collected and published in America.
2. Exploring the expressive potential of prolonged silences in a medium that had cluttered the sound track since the arrival of talkies.
3. Refining the film score to complement what he envisioned as the cinematic equivalent of chamber music.
4. Restoring the aesthetic value of the close-up to a prominence it had not achieved since the silent masterpiece of fellow Scandinavian director Carl-Theodor Dreyer, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928).
5. Expanding the compositional qualities of the frame and creating, along with his celebrated cinematographers, Gunnar Fischer and Sven Nykvist, some of the most celebrated long takes in film history.

In no other Bergman film are all of these achievements more prominent than in *Persona.* Indeed, after watching it again many years later, the director would write, "Today, I feel that in *Persona* . . . I had gone as far as I could go."[9]

Bergman's life, much of it reflected quite openly on the screen, can be understood (if necessarily reductively so) as a product of

his Lutheran bourgeois upbringing and the existentialist angst of postwar Europe. He was born on July 14, 1918, in Uppsala, Sweden, the middle child of strong-willed parents, Eric and Karin. His father soon moved the family to Stockholm, where he was appointed chaplain to the Royal Hospital and, in 1934, parish priest at Hedvig Eleonora Church. In his autobiography, *The Magic Lantern,* Bergman recalls his childhood as marked by perpetual cycles of "sin, confession, punishment, forgiveness, and grace."[10] A sickly, sensitive child, Ingmar found refuge from the discipline imposed by his parents during frequent visits to his widowed grandmother's home in Uppsala, where he indulged in fantasies about the antiques and old photographs that had filled her apartment for a half century, listened to her nostalgic stories, and often accompanied her to the local movie theater. But even his grandmother, with whom he felt an intuitive bond of tenderness, could be a source of fearful punishment, once locking him in a dark closet to atone for some forgotten misbehavior. Ingmar found a more permanent sanctuary in his child's puppet theater and, later, a magic lantern projector that had been a Christmas present for his older brother Dag, who swapped it for Ingmar's collection of tin soldiers. Karin Bergman was a devotee of the theater and encouraged her imaginative, reclusive son in his early fascination with puppetry and primitive filmmaking. Ingmar built elaborate sets for his marionettes and staged well-known plays for his private amusement. In addition to the technical training and experimentation this hobby provided, some biographers have suggested that Bergman's boyhood interest may have influenced both his own early reputation as a "demon director" intent on controlling every aspect of his stage and screen productions[11] and his predilection for deterministic themes in many of his films.

Bergman's distance from his parents, linguistically signified by his avoidance of the intimate pronoun *du* in his relations with them, grew into adolescent rebellion that climaxed in an argument in which he assaulted his father, insulted his mother, and left home permanently in 1937. The next year he enrolled in Stockholm University, where he soon became involved with the

student and local theaters, leaving the university in 1940 but continuing to stage plays, including one of his own, *The Death of Punch* (1942). In January 1943 he began working as a scriptwriter for Svensk Filmindustri (SF), Sweden's most prestigious company since the glorious silent era of Victor Sjöström (who was to play the starring role in Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* [1957]) and Mauritz Stiller (the man who discovered Greta Garbo). Many of the technicians and craftspersons had worked at SF for decades, so Bergman was trained by more experienced instructors than he could have found at the university or film school. Two months after joining the production company that employed him for the next twenty-six years he married Else Fisher, the first of his five wives; a daughter, Lena, was born in December.

As it had during World War I, Sweden remained neutral throughout World War II, a period that saw Bergman's dual career in theater and film begin to flourish. His first screenplay, *Torment,* was filmed by the distinguished Swedish director Alf Sjöberg, soon followed by his own directorial debut, *Crisis* (1946), which he also wrote. As these early titles and his personal life suggest (estranged from his own family, by the end of 1946 he had divorced, remarried, and fathered two children), Bergman was living and working at a fever pitch. The movies of his apprenticeship often deal with the stressful circumstances of a young couple, as if Bergman were expressing both his own anxieties and those of a guilt-ridden nation that insisted it too knew about suffering. Add to this cultural context the rising influence of French existentialism, and Bergman's absorption in the philosophical/theological questions that mark his mature work are not difficult to comprehend.

The dozen or so pictures that mark Bergman's first decade at SF, although varying in style from the gritty urban neorealism of *Port of Call* (1948) and melodramatic fatalism of *Prison* (1949) to the lyrical eroticism of *Summer Interlude* (1951) and *Monica* (1953), all reflect – with the singular exception of *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953), an anomaly that anticipates his metaphysical costume dramas of the mid-1950s – the resistance of youthful, restless characters to the conventions of contemporary Swedish society. These early

works, although competently crafted and sincerely felt, were not huge successes in Sweden. It was Bergman's continuing activity in the theater, a tradition among Swedish filmmakers, along with the loyal patronage of Carl Anders Dymling and Victor Sjöström at Svensk Filmindustri, that sustained him. He directed an average of three plays a year throughout the country, many of them at the Gothenburg City Theater, during this period, which introduced him to several of the performers he would later incorporate into his films. Indeed, Bergman has never abandoned the theater, maintaining an active schedule of directing for the stage (most notably for the Royal Dramatic Theater, Stockholm, which he presided over from 1963 to 1967) that continued long after his retirement from filmmaking.

Bergman's breakthrough into international cinema began with *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), which won a Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and was enthusiastically received after its American release. With *The Seventh Seal,* which premiered to great fanfare and subsequent critical debate in Stockholm as Svensk Filmindustri's fiftieth anniversary production, and *Wild Strawberries,* winner of the Golden Bear Prize at Berlin among numerous other accolades, both released in 1957, Bergman's status as a director of the very highest rank was confirmed. *The Virgin Spring* (1960) and *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961) won consecutive Academy Awards for Best Foreign Film. In an era when the art film served to fill a cultural void created by the collapse of the Hollywood studio system and the enormous new popularity of television, Bergman had joined a small galaxy of filmmaking superstars.

Despite a turbulent private life that included five marriages, eight children, and intimate relationships with several of his leading actresses, Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann (the mother of his youngest child, Linn) among them, his reputation as a film and stage director continued to grow. Bergman has always contended that his personal neuroses, which he readily acknowledges, have rarely interfered with his professional activities. He takes particular pride in his craftsmanship and likens his work to that of the anonymous artisans who created the cathedral of Chartres.[12] Of

his sometimes scandalous affairs Bergman has written, "Film work is a powerfully erotic business; the proximity of actors is without reservations, the mutual exposure is total. The intimacy, devotion, dependency, love, confidence and credibility in front of the camera's magical eye become a warm, possibly illusory security. The strain, the easing of tension, followed by anticlimax: the atmosphere is irresistibly charged with sexuality."[13] Whatever the case, it is certainly true that Bergman has always enjoyed a fierce admiration and loyalty among those who served him on the set. His farewell film, *Fanny and Alexander,* involved a remarkable reunion of present and past wives, former lovers, children and stepchildren as well as longtime collaborators. "Bergman's ability to remain true friends with the women he has abandoned is uncanny,"[14] his biographer reports. Liv Ullmann, for example, has recently produced his novel, *Private Confessions,* for Swedish television and will direct *Faithless (Trolösa),* his latest screenplay. At the same time, it should be noted that his marriage to Ingrid von Rosen endured, apparently happily, for nearly twenty-five years until her death in 1995.

Around the time of *Persona* in the mid-1960s, Bergman's films began to shift away from metaphysical themes to more personal studies of intimate human relationships and psychological dimensions. *Cries and Whispers* (1972) and *Face to Face* (1976) continued to enhance his prestige, but Bergman's good fortune came to a shocking halt in 1976 when he was arrested by Swedish authorities in the midst of a rehearsal of Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* at the Royal Dramatic Theater and charged with tax evasion, an event that immediately became a cause célèbre in Sweden and, before long, internationally. Under considerable strain, the hypersensitive director suffered a breakdown that caused him to be hospitalized. The situation reminded many observers of a scene from a Bergman movie: the kind of public humiliation he had feared since childhood and had dramatized in *Sawdust and Tinsel, Wild Strawberries,* and *The Magician* (1958). The charges were eventually dropped with the accused officially exonerated by the Swedish government in 1979, but not before the bitterly disillusioned Bergman announced his intention to leave Sweden in order to

protest the bureaucracy and preserve his artistic freedom. His sojourn eventually took him to Munich, where he resumed his dual career, but his film work, perhaps inevitably, suffered. Although he continued to maintain his home on the island of Fårö, he did not return to Sweden permanently until 1981 for the production of *Fanny and Alexander,* which won four Academy Awards and a considerable profit for Svensk Filmindustri. Reconfirmed as a national treasure following the international success of his finale as a feature filmmaker, Bergman resumed directing plays at the Royal Dramatic Theater and, in 1987, published his autobiography, *The Magic Lantern,* which became an immediate best-seller in Europe. A decade later, in reasonably good health, he plans new projects and receives new honors from around the world. Life, one presumes, is good.

IV. THE PRODUCTION OF *PERSONA*

Bergman's "most daring and enigmatic film"[15] grew from an extraordinary convergence of personal circumstances and fortuitous events:

1. A crisis of faith in his own creative powers brought on by the administrative drudgery of his position as head of the Royal Dramatic Theater; Bergman has often referred to *Persona* as his artistic salvation, the film that "saved my life."[16]
2. A prolonged illness involving a viral infection of the inner ear that left him dizzy, incapacitated, and ultimately hospitalized during the first several months of 1965.
3. A chance view of a photograph of Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann, who had recently become close friends; Bergman noticed the strong resemblance between the two actresses and began conceiving of a film starring them both, "a sonata for two instruments," as he would later describe it.[17]
4. The image of two women wearing big hats and comparing hands that floated into Bergman's mind during his hospitalization along with his view of the morgue from his bedside window.

Perhaps influenced by the international political climate at the time as well as the radically new styles developed by European directors like Godard (*Vivre sa vie* [1962], *Pierrot le fou* [1965]), Resnais (*Hiroshima, mon amour* [1959], *Last Year at Marienbad* [1961]), and Antonioni (*L'avventura* [1960]) and certainly reflecting his own need to expand as an artist, *Persona* became Bergman's most innovative film to date, marking a shift toward narrative disruption and technical experimentation that continued in *Hour of the Wolf* (1968) and *The Passion of Anna* (1969). The screenplay was much different from anything he had published before, "more like the melody line of a piece of music," he suggested, "which I hope with the help of my colleagues to be able to orchestrate during production."[18] The earlier scripts read like plays; this one, although carefully constructed, is closer to a treatment from which entirely new images and ideas were allowed to emerge spontaneously during production. Most famous among these improvisations, of course, is the trick shot fusing the "bad sides" of the actresses' faces. As a result of the many retakes and revisions

during the actual shooting of the film, the published screenplay, although useful as a source for genetic criticism (the study of how a work of art evolved into its final form), remains an unreliable text for clarifying the experience of watching *Persona.*

In general, the script tends to clarify certain ambiguities and offers few indications of the film's striking formal design. For example, Elisabet definitely directs Alma to go to bed after her long narration of the beach orgy (instead of inscribing the moment's subjectivity by having her whisper offscreen), and it is Elisabet, not Alma, who breaks down into nonsense near the end. Even more significantly, the psychiatrist returns in the screenplay to pronounce a Freudian diagnosis ("strongly developed infantility") and inform us that Elisabet has successfully rejoined her family and career. And the published text gives no description of Bergman's exciting visual prologue or the repetition of Alma's climactic monologue.

V. COMING TO TERMS WITH *PERSONA*

Unlike most commercial movies, *Persona,* for all its ambiguities, may seem easy to talk about (interpret) precisely because it is difficult to understand (comprehend). The problems it presents for viewers are obvious: (1) the absence of visual codes to distinguish between what is dreamed or imagined and what is actually occurring; (2) the ellipses, doublings, and disruptions that confound any sense of a linear narrative; (3) the montage of apparently unrelated images and the presence of the strange boy at the beginning and end; (4) the discontinuities in space and time, as in the scene with Mr. Vogler or the reappearance of Alma in her uniform treating the apparently hospitalized Elisabet near the end; (5) the inconsistencies in point of view ranging from the apparently objective diagnosis provided at the outset by the psychiatrist and the voice-over narration (from Bergman himself) describing the transition to the island to the subjectivity of Elisabet's night visit to Alma's bedroom or the mirror shots of the two women. Alan Barr has accurately described how *Persona* "systematically thwarts

the desire to know, that hallowed pursuit of plot-followers,"[19] but Robin Wood seems equally correct in arguing "we are to take it that what we see is *in some sense* really happening."[20] In short, all may be illusion – in one sense, it is *all* "a tissue of lies" (to quote *Cries and Whispers* [1972]), *only a movie;* at the same time, we feel a powerful need to accept this particular film as a representation of some profound truth.

Perhaps the best procedure for considering the construction of meaning in *Persona* is to begin with the most widely held view of its content: Whatever else it may be about, the film is concerned with its own status as a work of art and, as a consequence, the problematic relation between the artist and the audience. To underscore the integrity of his medium and the self-reflexive aspect of his themes, Bergman lobbied for the title *Cinematography* before finally relenting to SF's demand for a more appealing name, and he insisted that the sprocket holes at the edge of the frame be retained in the early publicity stills for *Persona.* Most critical studies to date have emphasized the significance of the film's self-referentiality: the autobiographical content, the commentary on the limits and responsibilities of art, the relation to the cinema's system of signification.[21] In its pervasive self-reflexivity, *Persona* marks a kind of midpoint in Bergman's exploration of the role of the artist in such works as *Sawdust and Tinsel, The Magician, Hour of the Wolf, Shame* (1968), *Autumn Sonata* (1978), and *Fanny and Alexander.* From the perceptive but still sanguine view of the intrinsically deceptive nature of his craft he had described in the introduction to the first anthology of his screenplays,

> Even today I remind myself with childish excitement that I am really a conjurer, since cinematography is based on deception of the human eye. I have worked it out that if I see a film which has a running time of one hour, I sit through twenty-seven minutes of complete darkness – the blankness between frames. When I show a film I am guilty of deceit. I use an apparatus which is constructed to take advantage of a certain human weakness, an apparatus with which I can sway my audience in a highly emotional manner. . . . Thus I am either an imposter or, when the audience is

> willing to be taken in, a conjurer. I perform conjuring tricks with apparatus so expensive and so wonderful that any entertainer in history would have given anything to have it.[22]

Bergman had developed a much more critical understanding in his notebook during the making of *Persona:*

> I am unable to grasp the large catastrophes. They leave my heart untouched. At most I can read about such atrocities with a kind of greed – a pornography of horror. But I shall never rid myself of those images. Images that turn my art into a bag of tricks, into something indifferent, meaningless.[23]

This is Elisabet Vogler's dilemma, as well as Bergman's. Her silence becomes her protest.

Bergman's awareness of his artistic predicament undoubtedly stemmed from the tide of political consciousness-raising in the 1960s. He had been steadily criticized, especially in the Swedish and French press, for his isolation on Fårö and his apparent refusal to engage contemporary events within his films. The insertion of iconic images from the holocaust (the Warsaw ghetto child) and Vietnam (the self-immolation of the Buddhist bonze) provides a resonance that transcends the idealist vision of his earlier historical melodramas and psychological case studies. At the same time, they remind us of the gulf that separates documentary and fictional representations.

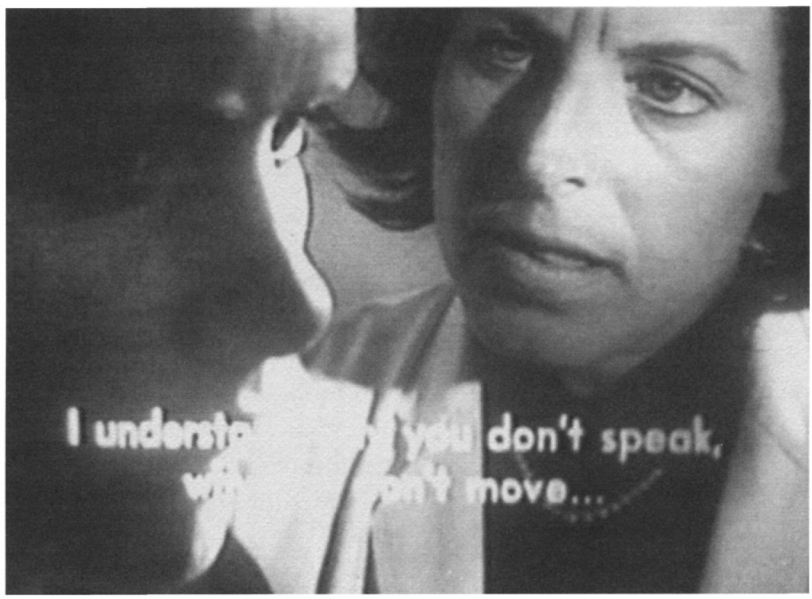
When we consider these historical references along with the film's refiguring of the women's faces into the composite image of a monstrous double, *Persona* may be fairly regarded as a kind of modernist horror movie. In addition to the newsreel, it includes (twice) another film-within-the-film: a snippet of primitive horror farce in which a man is chased around his bedroom by a skeleton, a scene Bergman first used in *Prison* (1949). *Persona* specifically evokes the vampire subgenre through its images of Elisabet lowering her head to caress the nape of Alma's neck and later sucking the blood that bubbles from her wrist. Alma's dedication to caring for others, her breakdown into madness and violence, and her

attraction to mirrors may also conjure up the mythic figure of Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde.

The film's title, of course, introduces the motif of masks that culminates in the composite close-up of Alma/Elisabet – a mask, to borrow Roland Barthes's description of modern art, that points to itself. As *Persona* questions narrative representation and continuity in its formal construction, its story line blurs conventional distinctions between being and role playing. The psychiatrist's diagnosis of Elisabet's "hopeless dream *to be*," cited in nearly all accounts of the film including those anthologized here, still needs to be qualified as a definitive interpretation of Bergman's meaning. Her speech occurs very early in the film, never to be alluded to or repeated. We also have the director's own testimony that Elisabet's silence is "completely unneurotic . . . a strong person's form of protest."[24] Moreover, the spectator familiar with Bergman's other work will recognize in the psychiatrist's detached, authoritarian, and imperious demeanor as she pronounces the clinical verdict of science a recurrent figure (*The Magician, The Passion of Anna, The Touch* [1971]) whose name is always Vergérus. In her anonymity and subsequent disengagement (a revision of the screenplay), she too wears a mask.

The hopeless dream of being, *Persona* implies, is the shared condition of both life and film art. In its aspiration to escape subjectivity, the cinema inevitably falls back on special effects (its expensive and wonderful apparatus) and the audience's willingness "to be taken in"; from our own desire to live in truth, we invariably resort to another kind of performance that experience will, in time, unmask. But to go beyond romantic conceptions of the artist as redeeming visionary or exemplary sufferer, as Elisabet apparently has, or to renounce a conventional life of service, as Alma seemingly does, need not necessitate dismissing the efficacy of either works of art or good deeds. To the tyranny of lies, Bergman responds with the necessity of illusions.

Paisley Livingston confirms this view of *Persona* when he suggests, "If [Mrs.] Vogler's silence queries art, art returns the question, measuring the value and consequences of an actress's refusal



to continue. Vogler, then, is not the voice of *Persona;* rather, the film gives voice to her silence."[25] In a succession of films from his mature period – one thinks of the hillside picnic in *The Seventh Seal* that provides an interlude of clarity and peace in the midst of plague, the deus ex machina ending of *The Magician* whereby Dr. Vogler is miraculously rescued from disgrace, and the gorgeous autumnal tableau of the three sisters in a swing at the conclusion of *Cries and Whispers* – Bergman reminds us of the illusory element in all moments of heightened perception, community, transcendence, and happiness as he simultaneously suggests that the solace, affirmation, and joy contained in these images is something more than merely a sentimental religious faith or an existential joke. By such illusions, he seems to say, do we all manage to live.

Such is my own understanding of *Persona.* The essays collected here offer a variety of distinctive critical approaches that illuminate the film's continuing hold over sophisticated patrons of the art cinema and inexperienced patrons of the multiplex alike. The

first two chapters are concerned primarily with *contexts,* providing the sources and cultural background that stimulated Bergman's creative energies. The remaining essays offer new *readings* of the film based on different methodologies for explicating how a cinematic text constructs meaning and is, in turn, itself constructed by various spectators.

Birgitta Steene, a native of Sweden who holds appointments at the University of Washington and Stockholm University, is probably the world's leading authority on Ingmar Bergman. Her essay draws on her knowledge of Swedish film and stage history to demonstrate that Bergman's artistic vision, while employing certain universally recognized elements, is "filtered through an indigenous Swedish mindscape" and influenced, in particular, by the "symbiotic presence" of August Strindberg's *A Dreamplay.* Drawing on several previously untranslated documents, she illustrates how *Persona* "occupies a position in the Bergman canon similar to *A Dreamplay* in Strindberg's oeuvre," and how both works reflect a dialectical tension between classical narrative and modernist discourse.

An experimental filmmaker as well as a scholar of wide-ranging interests, Wheeler Winston Dixon describes the cultural ambience of the international art cinema at the time of *Persona*'s release, emphasizing the influence of Jean-Luc Godard as well as placing this film in the context of Bergman's long career.

Susan Sontag's 1967 essay, first published as a review in the British magazine *Sight and Sound* and anthologized in her book *Styles of Radical Will,* is reprinted here because it has informed nearly all subsequent discussions of *Persona.* It exemplifies her contention, expressed in a famous essay entitled "Against Interpretation," that "the function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is,* even *that it is what it is,* rather than to show *what it means.*"[26] Employing this formalist approach, Sontag defines *Persona* as "not just a representation of transactions between the two characters . . . but a meditation on the film which is 'about' them." This self-reflexiveness is usually represented through the theme of *doubling,* expressed through both the film's formal struc-

ture and the exchange of identities. Careful readers will also note Sontag's reference to the image of an "erect penis" in the credits montage, a shot that was subsequently withdrawn from American prints of the film. Thirty years after its publication (and thus without the benefit of analyzing projectors, videocassettes, and repeated viewings), this essay remains remarkable for its synthesis of the film's competing claims – formal, psychological, erotic – and its placement of *Persona* in relation to several landmarks of modernist cinema: Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad,* Antonioni's *L'avventura,* Buñuel's *Belle de Jour,* and Bergman's own *The Silence.*

Unlike much that has been written about *Persona,* Christopher Orr's new study eschews issues of intentionality and biography in order to examine Bergman's film through the concept of genre. Orr sees *Persona* as an amalgam of the art cinema's self-reflexivity and the melodrama's unveiling of anxiety over such social issues as class and gender, producing what he calls "subversive melodrama." While Elisabet Vogler personifies the dilemma of the modern artist, he argues, she remains as well a member of Sweden's cultural elite, enjoying a quite different status from that of the nurse who cares for her. The interaction between Alma and her patient, although certainly expressing the fragile nature of personal identity, thus also exposes class exploitation and envy.

Many commentators have noted Bergman's skill in eliciting strong performances from his repertory company of actors – none more compelling than those of Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann in *Persona* – but Steven Vineberg's essay is the first to analyze this aspect of the film in depth. After surveying the evolution of acting style in Bergman's largely neglected early work, he employs certain standard acting exercises as models to explain the effects achieved in several of *Persona*'s most celebrated scenes and to demonstrate how the film is about "the seduction and power of acting."

Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's concluding essay follows some of the most recent directions in film theory to shift attention to spectatorship rather than authorship as a means of generating a film's meaning. Adopting the stance of feminist and queer theory, she

sees *Persona* as dramatizing a struggle for control of the imaginary "lesbian phallus," site of female pleasure beyond patriarchal norms. Her analysis, although speculative and challenging, offers a forthright discussion of a major element in the film – the homoerotic relationship between the two women – that has been consistently repressed until now.

Although none of these studies claims to be definitive, together they may guide the awestruck, puzzled, or simply bored viewer toward a more comprehensive understanding of Bergman's achievement. Near the end of the film, a disillusioned Alma remarks bitterly, "I've learned a lot." The attentive spectator of *Persona,* it is hoped, will feel much the same way (without the bitterness!) after reading this book.

NOTES

1. Stig Björkman, Torsten Manns, and Jonas Sima, *Bergman on Bergman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 198–199.
2. Peter Cowie, *Ingmar Bergman: A Critical Biography* (New York: Scribner's, 1982), 231.
3. Robin Wood, *Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 156.
4. Hubert Cohen, *Ingmar Bergman: The Art of Confession* (New York: Twayne, 1993), 227.
5. Bruce Kawin, *How Movies Work* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 76.
6. John Simon, *Ingmar Bergman Directs* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), 215.
7. Bergman has directed three features with "face" *(ansikte)* in the title: *Woman without a Face* (1947); *The Magician* (1957, released in England as *The Face,* a literal translation of the original Swedish title); and *Face to Face* (1976). After his retirement he also made a short memorial to his mother entitled *Karin's Face* (1983).
8. Andrew Sarris, *Confessions of a Cultist* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), 292.
9. Ingmar Bergman, *Images* (New York, Arcade, 1994), 65.
10. Ingmar Bergman, *The Magic Lantern* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), 7.
11. Birgitta Steene, *Ingmar Bergman: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), 8.
12. Ingmar Bergman, *Four Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), 21.
13. Bergman, *The Magic Lantern,* 169–170.
14. Cowie, 230.

15. Egil Törnqvist, *Between Stage and Screen: Ingmar Bergman Directs* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 137.
16. Bergman, *Images,* 64.
17. Cowie, 227.
18. Ingmar Bergman, *Persona and Shame* (New York: Grossman, 1972), 21.
19. Alan P. Barr, "The Unraveling of Character in Bergman's *Persona,*" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 15.2 (1987): 127.
20. Wood, 153.
21. See, especially, Simon, 208–310; Paisley Livingston, *Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 180–221; Lloyd Michaels, *The Phantom of the Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 33–46.
22. Bergman, *Four Screenplays,* 15.
23. Bergman, *Images,* 59.
24. Björkman, Manns, and Sima, 211.
25. Livingston, 181.
26. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Delta, 1966), 14.

BIRGITTA STEENE

1 Bergman's *Persona* through a Native Mindscape

Throughout his creative life Ingmar Bergman has acknowledged his cultural roots in Swedish literature, theater, and film. This being the case, it seems a paradox that his filmmaking career would come to fruition only after his work gained acceptance on the international film circuit in the mid-1950s. But a brief look at the two films that catapulted Bergman into visibility outside his native Sweden – *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955) and *The Seventh Seal* (1956) – suggests that his artistic inspiration drew on a combination of internationally established genre patterns and native cultural contexts. *Smiles of a Summer Night* followed the structure of the European musical operetta[1] while also emulating the erotic badinage of Swedish filmmaker Mauritz Stiller (*Eroticon,* 1918), later found in the films of Ernst Lubitsch and René Clair. *The Seventh Seal,* an existential road movie set in the fourteenth century, built on the medieval morality play, Dürer engravings, and mural church art, revitalized as a dramatic genre in August Strindberg's station or quest dramas from the last turn of the century *(To Damascus*; *A Dreamplay).* In other words, Bergman's artistic motifs and structures are in many ways as international as they are native, making them both "exotic" and recognizable to foreign viewers. Ultimately, however, his aesthetic vision appears to be filtered through an indigenous Swedish mindscape. This seems also to be the case in terms of the genesis and dramaturgical pattern of *Persona.*

By the time he made *Persona* Bergman's reputation in the cinema was global, and his film quickly became recognized as a self-reflexive masterpiece, exposing a screen narrative in the making. Subsequent discussions have focused on its emblematic nature as a metafilm or on its novel way of portraying psychological tension by coupling a speaking and a nonspeaking character. Contextual references have mostly been confined to Bergman's personal condition and state of mind at the time the film was conceived. But *Persona* also describes an aesthetic exploration undertaken very consciously by its maker. That exploration can be linked to Bergman's dual commitment to the stage and the cinema, and to his fascination with Strindbergian drama.

Bergman's involvement in both the theater and the cinema was established already in his teens when he alternately experimented with his puppet theater and his magic lantern. It was also part of a Swedish tradition where a number of Bergman's predecessors, most notably Victor Sjöström and Alf Sjöberg, had shared their time between filmmaking and stagecraft. For many years throughout the 1940s and 1950s Bergman followed in their footsteps and maintained a rigorous work schedule as both theater and film director. However, at the time of making *Persona,* this symbiotic relationship between stage work and filmmaking had come to an impasse. If, as Bergman once stated, the cinema could be referred to as his mistress and the theater as his faithful wife, *Persona* may be seen as his troubling brainchild, conceived and aborted in the aftermath of a split-up of his artistic ménage à trois. The film was made after a professional crisis with Bergman leaving his post as administrative and artistic head of the Royal Dramatic Theater and landing in a hospital during a rather prolonged illness.[2] Certainly these events can be read into *Persona.* After all, Elisabet Vogler's "story" is that of an actress resigning suddenly from her stage work, withdrawing from the world as a mute patient in the hospital, only to find out that reality filters through in the form of newscasts, letters, photographs, and the incessant confession of her prosaic stand-in, the nurse Alma. At the end of the film (if it has an end), Elisabet is seen in the same Electra makeup as in the beginning vignette from her stage

performance, but now she is being filmed in a studio. Her story thus parallels Bergman's own professional and personal experience of resignation from stage work, withdrawal, illness, and eventual recovery before turning again to the film medium.

The tug-of-war between different professions, lifestyles, and personalities that constitutes *Persona*'s psychological core is complemented by the narrative dialectic of the film where two representational modes are vying for attention and space. At one end of the spectrum we find the narrative scraps of the classical mainstream cinema; at the other end, *Persona* reflects Bergman's struggle to evolve a personal film style by exploring a modernist narrative discourse. In this process, Bergman engages in a repeat performance of his older compatriot August Strindberg (1849–1912), who shifted, after a period of personal tension that transformed itself into a new artistic vision, from a naturalistic – that is, a tightly structured and logically conceived dramaturgy, to a modernist – that is, subjective, associative, and fluid dramaturgy. *Persona* occupies a position in the Bergman canon similar to *A Dreamplay* in Strindberg's oeuvre. Both works represent artistic attempts to explore and consolidate experiences rooted in a midlife existential crisis. In Strindberg's case, the so-called inferno period in the mid-1890s resulted in a new metaphysical conception of reality. For Bergman, his resignation from the Royal Dramatic Theater came in the aftermath of his questioning of his childhood religious heritage, which had structured his metaphysically "reductive" films of the early 1960s: *Through a Glass Darkly, Winter Light,* and *The Silence.* Although Strindberg superimposed a divine rationale on his new philosophical schema whereas Bergman confirmed a nihilistic position, an almost uncanny parallel is evident in their artistic developments. There is certainly strong evidence that Strindberg affected Bergman's creative consciousness so deeply that he himself came to see their kinship as a form of artistic symbiosis. In an interview he once stated, "If you live in a Strindberg tradition, you are breathing Strindberg air. After all, I have been seeing Strindberg at the theater since I was ten years old, so it is difficult to say what belongs to him and what to me."[3]

A young Ingmar Bergman on the set

INGMAR BERGMAN AND CLASSICAL (MAINSTREAM) CINEMA

Contrary to most retrospective assessments of Bergman's film career that view him as a director who sprang forth as a European auteur, Bergman's apprentice years in filmmaking meant learning to function within a popular film industry very similar to Hollywood's commercial interests and adhering to the principles of classical sutured cinema.[4] When Ingmar Bergman joined the Svensk Filmindustri (SF) in 1943 as a reader and would-be scriptwriter, box office success was the criterion governing most Swedish filmmaking. Financial payoff was thought to depend on

an adherence to Hollywood's dramaturgical conventions. In his book *Images* (1990) Bergman reminisces,

> This [Hollywood] film dramaturgy was extremely evident, almost rigid: the audience was never to doubt where they were [in the story]. There was to be no hesitancy about who was who, and narrative transitions were to be treated with care. Climactic points were to be apportioned and placed at specifically assigned places in the script. The culmination was to be saved to the end.[5] (translation mine)

Behind Bergman's subsequent filmmaking one can observe the quandary of a screenwriter and director who discovers the potential of the film medium to transcend Hollywood's dramaturgical rationale but who never rejects that rationale completely. What one could call Bergman's mainstream heritage, that is, his focus on telling a story and doing so with utmost clarity, never leaves him. In fact, it becomes both an aesthetic and a moral issue for him. As late as 1959, when he had experienced his international breakthrough and could begin to write his own ticket, he still felt compelled to set down certain rules for himself – he calls them "commandments" – in order to sort out his sense of obligation to the public of a mass medium and to his own ambitions and need for artistic integrity. He wants to explore what he alternately calls "the dangerous roads" and "the dramaturgy of the juicy dream." His goal is to transcend the world of outer action and penetrate into "the twilight land of suprareality." But he cannot abandon the demand for narrative clarity as a communicative and artistic principle:

> For me personally this question constantly pops up: Can I express myself in a more simple, pure and brief way? Does everyone understand what I am saying? Can the most unsophisticated person follow this train of development? . . . In all experimenting there is a great and obvious risk, since the experiment always leads away from the public. The road away from the public can lead to sterility, confinement in the ivory tower. . . . Since I do not create my work for my own or a few people's spiritual elevation but for the entertainment of millions, the . . . imperative [of clarity] usually wins

> out. But sometimes I still try the riskier alternative and it turns out that the public also absorbs an advanced irrational line of development with a surprisingly open ear.[6]

Until the very end of his filmmaking career Bergman performs a balancing act between classical film narrative with its underlying assumption that film is popular entertainment and a modernist dramaturgy based on his own aesthetic impulses and desire to explore the full potential of the film medium. He addresses the issue on numerous occasions, as in an interview from the 1980s:

> They [the first images] are often very veiled and secretive and actually a little incomprehensible, and I don't really know what they want to tell me. But then I don't stop there, as Tarkovski does, but I continue, for I want clarity. I have an important need to communicate and in communicating I try the whole time to make concrete what's in my mind, in my imagination and to untangle it so that it will become comprehensible. . . .[7]

One could say that *Persona*'s subject matter revolves precisely around a filmmaker's efforts to grasp, clarify, and communicate the images that trigger a screen story. As numerous commentators of *Persona* have argued, the viewer is invited to follow the making of a film, from the first impulses that well forth as images from the subconscious (*Persona*'s initial visual collage) to the verbalized manuscript stage (the boy and his book), which is put aside to make room for the unfolding story on the screen. In a 1959 essay Bergman actually describes the creative process in a similar way:

> Often it begins with very vague and indefinite foetal movements. . . . All of it are short impressions, swift as a second, and they disappear as quickly as they revealed themselves. . . . I want to say at once that it is not a question of a Pallas Athene out of Zeus' head but an extremely disconnected happening, more of a mental state than a story, but still flowing with fruitful associations and images. . . . From the start this amoebic-like existence is striving for a form, but the movement is lethargic and a little sleepy. If it turns out that this half-finished mass has enough

> forcefulness to be transformed into a film, I decide to materialize it and now the scriptwriting itself begins.[8]

Structuring the associative and sensuous images that constitute the possible making of a film into a script is an arduous process for Bergman:

> So I have decided to make a certain film and now a complicated and difficult job begins: to transfer rhythms, moods, tensions, sequences, musical keys and smells to words and sentences in a readable or at least intelligible manuscript.
>
> It is difficult, not to say impossible.[9]

The reason for this difficulty is twofold: First, written language cannot capture the rhythm of a film, which must proceed from images and not from words; second, written language – defined by Bergman as "literary language" – contradicts the film experience because it emanates from the intellect; it is a rational task that kills the sensuous magic of a film. In his analysis of the manuscript stage, Bergman recognizes an impossible dialectic that comes back to haunt him in *Persona* and that forms a parallel to his difficulty in reconciling the free-flowing dramaturgy of "the juicy dream" and the imposed logic of classical American film narrative. The way he struggles with this problem is analogous to the way in which he uses his Strindberg connection.

THE DRAMATURGICAL PRESENCE OF STRINDBERG

In the second half of the 1880s – inspired by the Frenchman Emile Zola's naturalistic dictum that a playwright approach his subject matter in a scientific frame of mind and aim for maximum verisimilitude by abiding by the unity of time, place, and action – Strindberg proceeded to write a series of dramas that combined linear plot development and contemporary analytical psychology. Among these plays are *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888), *The Creditors* (1888), and *The Stronger* (1889).

The world according to Strindberg consists of those who conceive, create, and spawn new ideas and those who feed on these ideas, appropriating them and reusing them as their own. A key word in his vocabulary is *befruktning* ("fertilization"). One central metaphor takes shape in Strindberg's mind: the homunculus or vampire image. He calls the phenomenon *själamord*/Psychic Murder or *härnornas kamp*/the Battle of Brains.[10]

One relatively early work of Strindberg's that dramatizes such a psychological tug-of-war is the monodrama *The Stronger.* The play is a contemporary one-scene *quart d'heure,* adhering to the naturalistic principles of the day. Its action coincides with the acting time; its location is confined to one place, a coffeehouse; its focus is on a single issue, the encounter of two women. *The Stronger* is typical of many of Strindberg's plays at the time in that it is set in an everyday milieu, yet quickly moves into a psychic realm, touching on the lives of two characters, Mrs X and Mlle Y, both actresses. A third character, Mrs X's husband, is part of the story or *fabula,* but is absent. Although Strindberg's play may be classified as a triangular melodrama whose main discourse is self-assertion brought about by Mrs X's gradual realization of her husband and Mlle Y's affair, its dramaturgical core centers around the ambiguous impact of speech and silence. *The Stronger* has only one speaking part, that of Mrs X, who talks incessantly. Talk turns out to be both self-revealing and therapeutic, whereas Mlle Y's silence appears to be self-protective and ensnaring. Thus the dramaturgical juxtaposition of speech and muteness creates its own psychological tension. At one point Mrs X blurts out:

> Why are you silent? You haven't said a word the whole time but have only let me sit here and do the talking! You've sat there with your eyes, unwinding all my thoughts which lay there like raw silk in a cocoon.

Mlle Y's silence spurs Mrs X to see in her a leechlike creature who has infiltrated her private world, not to steal her husband so much as to share him by making Mrs X adopt the other woman's habits and manners:

> Everything, everything came from you to me, even your passions! Your soul crept into mine like a worm in an apple, ate and ate, dug and dug until only the skin was left with a little black meal! I wanted to flee but I could not; you lay there like a snake with your black eyes and kept me spellbound. . . . I hate you, hate you, hate you! But you, you only sit there silent, calm, indifferent. . . .

In the end Mrs X leaves the coffeehouse to return to her married life, taking with her Mlle Y's persona and her emblem, the tulip motif: "Now, I go home – taking the tulips with me – your tulips! . . . Thank you, Amelie, for all your good lessons . . ."

The Stronger depicts a mental battle in a mundane fashion but implies a deadly contest that may result in psychic murder or psychic suicide (or "hamletism" as Strindberg called it). In such a contest no real winner emerges, and it seems futile to determine who is the "stronger." However, the dramaturgical device of pitting speech and silence against each other provides the two characters with rhetorical instruments that give them their performative identity, yet backfire on them psychologically. It allows Strindberg to create a dramatic situation where words serve an aggressive but also therapeutic function, and where silence creates frustration but also speaks louder than words.

It certainly seems that Strindberg's dramaturgical construction in *The Stronger* is explored by Ingmar Bergman in *Persona.* In what one might call (using Frederick Jameson's terminology) the master narrative, Bergman depicts the interaction of two women, the married actress Elisabet Vogler, who has chosen to become silent, and her nurse Alma, who does all the talking. The two women's performative space – a hospital room and a summer house on an island – is as confined as Strindberg's naturalistic stage.

The convalescing actress, at first a passive patient, begins to feed on Alma's chatter and is revitalized by it, while Alma embarks on an inner journey into a world filled with Elisabet's psychic presence and the welling forth of her own subconscious. Alma's talk has the same quality of initial smugness about her life, followed by gradual insight and increasing frustration as in Mrs X's behavior in *The Stronger.* At the end, dressed in her nurse's uni-

form, Alma is seen leaving the summer place and boarding a bus, alone. Having presumably extricated herself from Elisabet's hold on her, Alma's departure is reminiscent of Mrs X's exit at the end of *The Stronger.* Like Mrs X she takes something with her of the other woman's persona. But the parallel to Strindberg's naturalistic play cannot be pushed much further.

PERSONA'S SUBVERSION OF *THE STRONGER*

Despite its similarity to *The Stronger* in terms of rhetorical device, character constellation, and main psychological theme, Bergman's *Persona* is not a transposition of Strindberg's naturalistic monodrama. One might call it an adaptation if the term is allowed to accommodate the idea that a literary work might simply be an inspiration for a film. *Persona* has its own story to tell, including not only its master narrative but also its famous metafilmic exposé. The way this exposé and its implicit modernistic dramaturgy begin to infiltrate the tale of Alma and Elisabet results in a much more complex study of psychological transference than Strindberg's *The Stronger* can convey. *The Stronger* tends to remain an intriguing *idea* and a dramatic tour de force rather than an in-depth character conflict. It also remains firmly rooted within the conventions of the realistic theater.

One might use the dramaturgical handling of Elisabet's husband as an example of how Bergman's film parts company with *The Stronger.* In Strindberg's play, the absent husband forms the topical focus, whereas in *Persona* he is given a much stronger symbolic function. He enters the story verbally, through a letter he sends to his wife Elisabet in the hospital, which Alma begins to read to her. But it is his visual appearance in a "dream" sequence in the summer house that is crucial, where he is shared by both women – by Elisabet as voyeur and by Alma as her stand-in in a scene of lovemaking. The husband plays a pivotal role in Alma's absorption of Elisabet's persona, but his presence in the narrative is also structured as a parallel to Alma's destiny. His attempt to communicate through rational use of (written) language consti-

tutes an analogy to Alma's initial *verbalized* view of herself as a woman committed to her work and her upcoming marriage; and the husband's absorption into the psychic dreamlike world of the two women parallels Alma's eventual loss of self, culminating in the breakdown of her rational speech. Both characters demonstrate the master narrative's development from linear (rational) storytelling to a subjective dreamlike mode.

In shifting to such a dream mode and its dramaturgic consequences Bergman clearly breaks with the causal structure of *The Stronger.* In the early half of *Persona*'s master narrative he uses some of the stock devices of realistic filmmaking – for example, the third-person analytic comment (the doctor's diagnosis) and the descriptive voice-over (Bergman's own transitional narration as he shifts the women to the island). But these devices disappear as the narrative begins to unfold through Alma's increasingly confused mind. After the letter episode when Alma discovers Elisabet's betrayal of her confidence and after her own act of revenge (the glass splinter scene), ending with the famous rupture of the film, *Persona*'s story line becomes more and more internalized and diffuse. Dramaturgically speaking, we watch and are teased by a modernistic takeover that has threatened the film from its inception. No matter how we interpret its oft-discussed precredit sequence – as a directorial shock device, as a fleeting collage of film history, or as the imagined birth of a (Bergman) film – its associational barrage of images is clearly going to have to be controlled and structured by the filmmaker if he is to provide us with a coherent narrative at all. But it is also clear that the psychic world from which these images emanate will continue to haunt the filmmaker and compel his attention. Here again there is an uncanny parallel to Strindberg's dramaturgical course.

Some ten years after *The Stronger* was conceived, Strindberg, having left naturalism behind, began to search for a dramatic form that would be able to express his new conception of life – what one could call his *somnambulist dramaturgy,* that is, a form of dramatic vision where waking reality and dreamlike experiences were presumed to coexist. In his famous brief preface to *A Dream-play* (1901), Strindberg describes his efforts:

> [T]he author has tried to imitate the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream. Everything can happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality the imagination spins and weaves new patterns: a blending of memories, experiences, free inventions, absurdities and improvisations.
>
> The characters split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense, scatter and converge. But one consciousness remains above all of them: the dreamer's; for him there are no secrets, no inconsequence, no scruples, no law.[11]

Strindberg's modernist impulses were slow in taking roots in the Swedish theater, and his new dramaturgy was no immediate success. Although it was recognized as a pioneering achievement by the Swedish writer Pär Lagerkvist in 1918, six years after Strindberg's death,[12] it was in foreign stagecraft that Strindberg's artistic vision was first conveyed. The German director and master of the expressionist theater, Max Reinhardt, staged a 1920 Swedish-language production of *A Dreamplay* in a madman's world, linking the drama to the grotesque distortions and desperate fantasies of German *Schreidramen*. But although Reinhardt's rendition of Strindberg was of major importance in revitalizing Swedish stagecraft, his interpretation of *A Dreamplay* was considered alien to the mood of the drama, especially in ignoring its realistic details, lyrical quality, and melancholy dream mode. Twenty-five years after Reinhardt's bold production a young Ingmar Bergman resumed this critique that had been voiced in the original Swedish reception of Reinhardt's stagecraft:

> At first, Strindberg's inferno dramas put the strangest visions into the heads of Europe's directors, who felt they were out after Freudian deep-sea fish and began to throw themselves into levels, projections, and other devices for all they were worth. It was director's theater, display theater, but it wasn't Strindberg.[13]

To Bergman, as to the Swedish theater community at large, it was really Olof Molander's production of a cycle of Strindberg's dramas, beginning with *A Dreamplay* in 1934, that seemed to capture the essence of Strindberg's conception of a fluid, associational dra-

maturgy that to the Swedes remained rooted in concrete, local references. Molander's production became an overwhelming experience for the 17-year-old Ingmar Bergman and helped him discover the spellbinding power of Strindberg's theater. In the program note, just cited, to a staging of *The Pelican* at the Malmö City Intimate Theatre in 1945, Bergman revealed the impact that Molander's rendering of Strindberg had had on him ten years earlier. Of particular interest is Bergman's observation that Molander had understood how Strindberg's written text seeks out the stage as its magic medium; Bergman's statement conveys the same fascination with theatrical space as he was to express a few years later vis-à-vis the film medium where, in giving homage to the pioneers in the field, he chose to celebrate the magician Méliès, who defied the realistic parameters of the new medium.

> Molander has made us see the magic in Strindberg's dramaturgy. We have begun to understand that the strange fascination of the stage itself and the Strindbergian dialogue are compatible. Molander gives us Strindberg without embellishments . . . tunes in to the text, and leaves it at that. He makes us hear the poet's anxiety-driven fever pulse. It becomes a vision. . . . We listen to a strange, muted chamber music.[14]

Bergman's assessment of Molander's Strindberg production also points forward to his own attempt, in a work like *Persona,* to give *the spoken text* its own space. For instance, Alma's retelling of a sexual encounter in the past is not dramatized in visual flashback but is spoken directly to the listener in Elisabet's dusky bedroom, and Alma's examination of Elisabet's (and her own) role as a mother gains its power from being presented as a twice-told tale.

Olof Molander belonged to a generation of Swedish stage and screen directors who came to be associated with the development of an indigenous, part realistic/part phantasmagoric mise-en-scène that can be led back to his interpretation of Strindberg's modernist dramaturgy. Eventually Ingmar Bergman was to discuss that dramaturgy not only in terms of the stage but also as an essentially cinematic structure. For many years one of his ambi-

tions as a filmmaker was to transfer Strindberg's *A Dreamplay* to the screen.[15]

STRINDBERGIAN DRAMATURGY AND CINEMATIC STRUCTURE

Strindberg developed his dreamplay dramaturgy in the first decade of this century, just as the film medium was coming into being. A year before his death in 1912, Anna Hoffman Uddgren, whose husband was a confidant of Strindberg, had received permission by the playwright to "kinematograph as much of my production as you please."[16] Two films were made, *The Father* and *Miss Julie* (the latter lost). The surviving results show the staginess of the undertaking and the literal, although mutilated transfer to the screen of two naturalistic plays. Clearly the Swedish cinema had not yet caught up with Strindberg's new dreamplay concept. However, ten years later with a film like Viktor Sjöström's *The Phantom Carriage,* based on a novella by Swedish Nobel Prize winner Selma Lagerlöf and a favorite work in Bergman's film library, the medium caught up with Strindberg's dreamlike and associative approach in *A Dreamplay* (1901). In a departure from Lagerlöf's epic storytelling, Sjöström opted for an elliptical form of narration that emphasizes the dreamlike fluidity of time and space. Whereas Lagerlöf had been careful to provide a causal development, Sjöström elected an episodic approach. His carefully lit and composed scenes include a series of quadruple-exposed "transparent" vignettes of the driver of the death wagon. These scenes possess a fluidity reminiscent of *A Dreamplay*'s associational changing of scenes.[17] Sjöström's ambition was to focus on a psychological and metaphysical vision by combining realistic details and sublime elements. He never employs the grotesque and distorting forms of expressionism that Reinhardt brought to Sweden and that also constituted the collective style of the German expressionist cinema. Instead he relied on what has been called "the Swedish style," which had begun to evolve around 1913–1914, where lighting, composition, and outdoor shooting were used to

represent reality as something both mystical and poetic rather than deranged or spooky.

With a film like *The Phantom Carriage* one could claim the emergence of what film critic André Bazin once called a process of artistic paidomorphosis, that is, an example of an aesthetic development where a new art form such as the cinema brings an older existing form, such as the theater, to its fruition: "What makes it possible to believe that the cinema exists to discover or create a new set of dramatic facts is its capacity to transform theatrical situations that otherwise would never have reached their maturity."[18] Ironically enough the Swedish cinema did not pursue Sjöström's experimenting efforts to explore the film medium along the dramaturgical tracks suggested by Strindberg's *Dreamplay,* taking the spectator into both a realistic mise-en-scène *and* a reality beyond the tangible world, that is, into transcendent states of mind. The reasons for this failure are fairly clear: Sjöström left for Hollywood, and the Swedish film industry became more and more involved in international competition and collaboration, where the American realistic cinema established the ruling conventions. As mentioned earlier, the dominance of that film dramaturgy remained still strong in the early 1940s. This fact also helps explain why Bergman's older colleague in the theater and the cinema, Alf Sjöberg, who was the director of Bergman's first film script, *Torment* (*Hets,* 1944), was to argue in a postwar article (1949) that the cinema was lagging behind modernist developments in other art forms:

> It is obvious that the cinema has only to a small degree tested its potential at performing on several levels, at using simultaneous action and displacements. . . . For Hieronymus Bosch, Brueghel, Dali and Picasso, for Strindberg, Eliot and Ekelöf this is nothing strange. In their works the individual free-associates, doubles and is transformed; the gates to the unexpressed and the unconscious are opened and closed in a never-ending cycle. It is only the cinema, the very instrument of limitless expansiveness, that has not tested these roads, has not dared incorporate them as conventions, as self-evident ways of *seeing.*[19]

Sjöberg was not as ignorant of Sjöström's achievement and of avant-garde European cinema as his statement might suggest. But he voiced his views as a challenge directed at the contemporary Swedish cinema and during the peak of postwar neorealism. Above all, his essay was conceived as a justification for his own screen adaptation of Strindberg's play *Miss Julie* in which he was to depart drastically from Strindberg's naturalistic format. Sjöberg argued that the dramaturgical vision of *A Dreamplay* was much more relevant to him in filming *Miss Julie* because in *A Dreamplay* Strindberg had anticipated the development of the cinema. Sjöberg referred to Strindberg's vision and technique as "hallucinations-realism," perhaps best translated as "fantastic realism." Taking his dramaturgical cue from *A Dreamplay,* Sjöberg transformed *Miss Julie* into what has become a modern(ist) classic in the cinema. Parker Tyler includes the film in his volume *Classics of the Foreign Film* with the following comment:

> What is so remarkable about the filming of *Miss Julie* is the sheer aptness with which a first-rate, difficult dramatic text has been freed into real planetary space. . . . The filmmaker has taken up the play as a rich programme for bringing the past before us as literal hallucination.[20]

PERSONA AND THE SEMINAL PRESENCE OF *A DREAMPLAY*

The way one of Strindberg's naturalistic plays could be transferred to the screen by employing his modernist dream concept remains Sjöberg's initiative and coincides with Bergman's formative years in the cinema. But Bergman's link to Strindberg dates back to his youth and constitutes a very personal referential point throughout his career. *A Dreamplay,* in particular, has been a continuous challenge. He spends considerable space in his memoirs *The Magic Lantern* to discuss one of his *Dreamplay* productions. He has staged it three times in the theater and once on television. Its presence makes itself felt in the dream sequences in *Wild Strawberries.* Their dual quality of reminiscence and nightmare recall the

Strindbergian dichotomy of Fairhaven and Foulstrand in *A Dreamplay,* and the academic ceremony as described in the script is a travesty on the squabble among the four faculties in Strindberg's play. It seems no coincidence that Bergman concludes his filmmaking finale, *Fanny and Alexander,* with a direct reference – and homage – to Strindberg by having grandmother Ekdal read to her grandson, the would-be theater man Alexander, from the preface to *A Dreamplay.*

But Strindberg's seminal drama is present in a more subtle and intriguing way in *Persona.* One important way in which its symbiotic presence makes itself felt is in the construction of what Strindberg referred to in his preface as an all-encompassing dreamer consciousness that hovers over the dramatic action. This issue has raised the question of the identity of such a dreamer. Is Strindberg referring to a diegetic character like Indra's daughter, who descends to earth and initiates the dramatic action, or does he have her father, the Indian God, in mind, or perhaps the visionary Poet who is invited to follow Indra's daughter back to heaven? Or is the dreamer consciousness a nondiegetic presence in the play, its creative persona? This kind of ambiguity about the identity of a dream mind also characterizes our response to Bergman's *Persona.* Whose fantasy are we watching? Is it Alma's, who, in her infatuation with a well-known actress, dreams up this woman's destiny? Is it Elisabet's dream we are exposed to as she withdraws into her own psyche? Or is the boy staging his own dream, sprung from his longing and search for a mother? Or is the boy a personification of the dream machine, an instrument and a mind who substitutes for Bergman, an alter ego buried deep in the director's childhood, in a realm that Bergman has acknowledged, again and again, as his source of inspiration?

The boy in *Persona,* placed the way he is just prior to the master narrative, performs the function of a Bergmanian illusionist, a magician whose hand, moving across a screen door, becomes a wand that conjures forth a woman's face and transforms dead material into live images, which in turn initiate the master narrative at the moment the screen becomes a door in the hospital

where Alma and Elisabet (the transmuted face on the screen) will first meet. The boy's role, limited as it is in visual terms, seems enigmatic unless we see him as a consciousness who sets a product from the "dream factory" in motion. In such a role he takes on a function analogous to Indra's father in *A Dreamplay,* whose voice is heard in the prologue but who never appears in the dramatic story.

Indra comes from a realm beyond tangible human life, and so does the boy in *Persona,* who wakes up from among the dead in a hospital morgue. Indra sends his daughter to explore and experience fragments of human existence. In like manner, the two women in *Persona* emerge as fantasy or dream figures who enact a drama in the making. One might also note that in both Strindberg's and Bergman's master narratives, the main characters are doubling women with symbolic biblical names: Indra's daughter becomes Agnes (a name Bergman uses for the dying sister in *Cries and Whispers,* a woman likewise asked to be a spiritual interlocutor), and the initial woman's face on the glass door in *Persona*

splits (and eventually reemerges) as Alma (soul) and Elisabet (stern god). All three names suggest links to a transcendental world while their bearers move in a tenuous space that possesses both the imagistic clarity and emotional diffusiveness of a dreamer's vision.

It can be argued that behind *Persona* 's classical status as a self-reflexive film lies Bergman's use of the tools at his disposal as a filmmaker about to examine his return to the cinema after a personal and professional crisis. But the moment in his life and career that triggered the making of *Persona* is only the catalyst. Behind *Persona*'s psychological story and narrative structure lie impulses that have a direct connection to Bergman's lifelong fascination with Strindbergian drama but also work implicitly as a form of cultural osmosis, so that Bergman's need to explore the nonrealistic dimensions of the cinema becomes part of the same artistic syndrome that helped shape the work of earlier Swedish filmmakers like Victor Sjöström and Alf Sjöberg. To view *Persona* in such a context does not undermine its unique place in the annals of filmmaking history. It simply confirms what Bergman has often stated: no artist works in a cultural vacuum and he himself would like his films to be a link to those predecessors for whose works he feels a strong affinity.

NOTES

1. Bergman had produced Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow* just prior to writing the script for *Smiles of a Summer Night.*
2. These events are briefly discussed by Bergman in *Bergman on Bergman,* translated by Paul Austin Britten (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 195–199.
3. Bergman is referring here to Olof Molander's *Dreamplay* production at the Royal Dramatic Theater in 1934. See also Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker, *Ingmar Bergman: Five Decades in the Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 57.
4. Still as late as 1994, Thomas Elsaesser perpetuates the myth that Bergman's career was shaped within the perimeters of a government-subsidized film industry. See "Putting on a Show. The European Art Movie," *Sight and Sound* (April 1994): 22–26. But an official change in Swedish filmmaking policy did not occur until 1963 with

the foundation of The Swedish Film Institute, that is, at a time when Bergman had been making films for almost twenty years.

5. Ingmar Bergman, *Bilder* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1990). Translated by M. Ruuth as *Images – My Life in Film* (New York: Arcade, 1994), 118.
6. Ingmar Bergman, "Varje film är min sista film," *Filmnyheter,* No. 9–10 (1959). Translated as "Ingmar Bergman, My Three Most Powerfully Effective Commandments," *Film Comment* (Summer 1970): 9–12. See also the essay "Det att göra film," *Filmnyheter,* No. 19–20 (1954): 6. Translated and reprinted in part in Introduction to *Four Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), xiii–xxii, and in *Films and Filming* 2, No. 12 (September 1956): 14–15, and *Films and Filming* 3, No. 1 (October 1956): 15–16.
7. Mikael Timm, *Ögats glädje* (Stockholm: Carlsons, 1996), 136–137.
8. Ingmar Bergman, "Varje film är min sista film," 4.
9. Ibid.
10. See Barry Jacobs, "Psychic Murder and Characterization in Strindberg's "The Father," *Scandinavica* VIII:1 (1969): 19–34. The most clear example of Strindberg's ideas about psychic suggestion and subliminal influence appears in his short story "The Battle of Brains" (1887).
11. "Erinran" (Preface), *Ett drömspel* (Nationalupplagan. Stockholm: Norstedt, 1988).
12. Pär Lagerkvist, *Modern teater* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1918). Translated by Thomas R. Buckman as *Modern Theatre* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1966).
13. Program note to staging of Strindberg's *The Pelican* in Malmö in November 25, 1945.
14. Ibid.
15. See Introduction, *Four Screenplays,* xix. In interview in Timm, *Ögats glädje,* Bergman has changed his mind and states that *A Dreamplay* belongs on the stage.
16. August Strindberg, *Brev* XX, nr. 7772, edited by Björn Meidal (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1996).
17. See Bo Florin, *Den nationella stilen. Studier i den svenska filmens guldålder* (Stockholm: Aura, 1997), 160–184.
18. André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 79.
19. Alf Sjöberg, "Omskakning i bildsinnet," *Biografbladet* 30, No. 4 (Winter 1949–50): 258.
20. Parker Tyler, *Classics of the Foreign Film* (New York: Citadel, 1962), 166.

WHEELER WINSTON DIXON

2 *Persona* and the 1960s Art Cinema

I vividly recall the first time I saw *Persona,* after working all night on a film in New York City, traveling to Princeton, New Jersey, to shoot an industrial film, and then, that evening, exhausted after thirty-six hours without sleep, falling into a balcony seat at the Garden Theatre in Princeton, certain that I would be unable to stay awake for the duration of Bergman's latest film. I'd seen nearly all of his earlier films – *Wild Strawberries* (1957), *The Seventh Seal* (1956), *Summer with Monika* (1952), *The Magician* (1958), and other Bergman classics from the late 1950s and early 1960s – but nothing of his previous work prepared me for the mesmerizing imagery in *Persona,* arguably Bergman's most accomplished, and certainly his most audacious film. Despite my intense fatigue, I was immediately jolted awake by the opening montage of disparate imagery, by the spare mastery of Bergman's newly economical editorial style, and by Liv Ullmann's hypnotic performance as Elisabet Vogler, an actress who refuses to speak solely as an act of will.

Everything about the film was modern, signaling a break from Bergman's earlier work as a director. Above all, *Persona* was a plastic, kinetic, wholly cinematic film, responsive to then-current trends in international cinema, effortlessly absorbing the mise-en-scène of Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Resnais, Agnes Varda, and other post–New Wave filmmakers. If *The Magician* had relied on Max von Sydow's tour de force performance in the title role, *Persona*

was new cinematic territory for Bergman, shorn almost entirely of the theatrical constraints that marked his earlier directorial efforts. *Persona* is a film of light, motion, and cinematographic imagery rendered as a personal meditation on memory, loss, and identity. In place of the straightforward symbolism of *The Seventh Seal,* for example, in which Max von Sydow's knight plays chess with the figure of death as the fate of humankind hangs in the balance, Bergman in *Persona* offers a series of tantalizing images, glyphs that resist specific interpretation, woven together in a film which is simultaneously wondrous and deeply sinister. In the figure of Elisabet Vogler (Liv Ullmann), the actress who falls into an apparently self-induced regime of silence, Bergman gives us one of his most memorable and harrowing characterizations, made all the more astonishing by the fact that – except for one brief sequence – Elisabet remains mute for the entire film. Nevertheless, she is arguably the center of *Persona,* absorbing Nurse Alma's incessant chatter with cool, bemused detachment.

Then, too, in *Persona* Bergman finally breaks free of the proscenium arch tradition that informed his earlier work to create a film in which rips in the image, out-of-focus shots, repeated sequences, and elaborate optical effects constantly remind us that we are watching a film, a construct, a world that Bergman has invented solely for cinematic consumption. The first image in *Persona* is that of a projection arc lamp being fired up; in the last image, the arc is switched off, leaving us in spiritual and material darkness. *Persona*'s world exists only for the duration of the film's projection; it is a phantom zone, a place in which images count more than words, in which gestures are the sole measure of existence. The film's famous set pieces – Elisabet watching a monk immolating himself on television in her hospital room; the opening montage of a crucifixion intercut with scenes of a wintry forest from Bergman's childhood memories; our first glimpse of Elisabet's unwanted child, staring at the viewer through thick spectacles as he reaches toward an opaque rear-projection screen which displays oscillating images of Elisabet and Nurse Alma; and perhaps most strikingly, Nurse Alma's twice-repeated monologue centering

on the conception and birth of Elisabet's child – have become cinematic landmarks, along with Charles Foster Kane's dying words and Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart's airport farewell in Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca*. *Persona* is a classic, but it is a modern classic, a work of self-knowledge and self-reflexivity that incorporates the work of numerous other auteurs of the 1960s, but none so much as the great French filmmaker, Jean-Luc Godard.[1]

Godard burst on the international scene with his first feature, *Breathless* (1959), a prototypical gangster homage shot in a few weeks on a minuscule budget. In *Breathless,* Godard's restless hand-held camera captures the fatal flight of the film's protagonist, Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo) as if it were a newsreel of actual events, complete with jarring jump cuts to move the film's narrative along at a frenzied pace. Less than three years later, however, in *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live,* 1962), Godard had completely abandoned the use of a hand-held camera in favor of lengthy, elaborately choreographed tracking shots executed with a large Mitchell BNC camera, observing his characters with clinical detachment in sculptural, austere compositions of light and shadow, in shots lasting up to five minutes without a break. Godard refined this technique in subsequent films, especially *Masculine/Feminine* (1966), which was, oddly enough, coproduced by Bergman's home studio, Svensk Filmindustri, and shot partially on location in Stockholm.

Masculine/Feminine contains several shots that last a full eight minutes without a cut – notably the famous interview with Miss 19, which Godard subtitles "Dialogue with a Consumer Product." More than any other filmmaker, it seems to me, Jean-Luc Godard's inexorably penetrating camera gaze in his films of the early to middle 1960s informs Bergman's style in *Persona.* This is evident not only in the many lengthy sequences in which Nurse Alma recounts her past for a seemingly impassive Elisabet Vogler, as the camera lingers meditatively on the two women, but also in Bergman's distanced tracking shots on the beach as Nurse Alma frantically pursues Elisabet after their fight. There is also a sustained sequence in which we watch from a distance as Nurse Alma

accidentally breaks a drinking glass on the patio of their summer house (Bergman's actual summer retreat in real life), then maliciously leaves the broken glass on the patio pavement for several minutes so that Elisabet will cut her feet on it. Then, too, in his films of the mid-1960s, Godard often breaks into the narrative thread to introduce the extras in a scene to the audience (in *Pierrot le fou* [1965]), or to show the audience the camera directly photographing the action within the film (as in *Contempt* [1963] and *La Chinoise* [1967]). In *Persona,* Bergman at one point allows the film to "freeze" in the projection gate, then "burn" or "melt" into nothingness, another reminder that we are witnessing a filmic construct that Bergman can manipulate at will in both form and content. And at the end of *Persona,* Bergman and his cinematographer, Sven Nykvist, actually appear in a split-second cut to a crane filming Elisabet's performance as Electra.

Yet Godard's is certainly not the only external influence one feels in *Persona,* for *Persona* belongs to a decade in which the cinema became modern, a decade in which the constraints of Hollywood style and the inherent artificiality of the "fourth wall" of theatrical presentation (in which the actors and/or director of a film or play never acknowledge that they are performing for an audience) were swept away. Godard was only one filmmaker of the New Wave, a movement centering on a group of young international filmmakers who took the world by storm in 1959 through the mid to late 1960s.[2] Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* exploded on the unsuspecting public in 1959, but in his work of reinventing the syntax of cinema, Godard was assisted by his compatriots François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, Agnes Varda, Alain Resnais, Jean Rouch, and numerous others.[3] All these French filmmakers shared a passion for freeing the cinema from the realm of the studio; they brought their cameras into the street, using available light rather than studio arc lamps, real buildings, streets, and apartments rather than studio sets. Often, to save time, camerawork was done with a hand-held Arriflex, and scripts were improvised on the set from a bare outline of a scenario. At first anarchic in their iconoclastic use of jump cuts, abrupt transitions, "in"

jokes based on film classics, and nonexistent budgets (the average cost of a New Wave feature film, even as late as 1965, was still only $150,000), the international filmmakers of the New Wave became increasingly sculptural and formalist in their mid-1960s films. Black and white film was still a viable commercial medium, and as cable television, videocassettes, satellite transmission, and other mediums of distribution did not yet exist, all of the films of the New Wave played theatrically around the world, even in relatively small cities, as the only way to recoup their modest production cost.

Thus such disruptive and influential French New Wave films as Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), Agnes Varda's *Cleo from Five to Seven* (1961), François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1961), and Jacques Rivette's *Paris Belongs to Us* (1960) played side by side in the United States with more conventional mainstream fare such as the Rock Hudson/Doris Day romance films of the era. The effect on the cinema as a whole was transformative. On the one hand, American viewers were being reassured with predictable studio entertainment films – westerns, musicals, adventure films, and the like – but on the other, films that called the entire history of the cinema into question were equally available for individual consumption, often playing at a theater right down the block from the latest Pink Panther movie. Then, too, in the 1960s, movies became a crusade for many college students, a near-religious movement in which such revered auteurs as Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, John Ford, George Cukor, Jean Renoir, Sergei Eisenstein, Jean Cocteau, and numerous others were reestablished in the cinematic pantheon as filmmakers of the first rank.[4]

Although student filmmaking today is more ubiquitous than ever, it was in the 1960s that cinema first began to be taught as a university discipline throughout the United States, and indeed the world, and it was also in the 1960s that such independent filmmakers as D. A. Pennebaker and Andy Warhol first introduced 16mm sync-sound (lip synchronous dialogue) cameras to the production process, putting feature-length filmmaking for the first time within the reach of literally all those who chose to embrace

the discipline. Finally, filmmaking in the 1960s was extraordinarily cheap. Jean-Luc Godard's most expensive film of the 1960s, *Contempt,* cost only $1 million, and that film was an intentionally lavish international coproduction. More commonly, budgets for New Wave and European independent art films ran between $100,000 and $300,000, and even in Hollywood, one could still make a studio feature film for an average cost of $500,000. Thus, for perhaps the last time in the history of the medium, theatrical motion pictures (in the age before straight-to-tape films and other contemporary distribution methods) were a truly democratic medium, open to practically anyone who could raise as little as $100,000 for a 35mm black and white feature film. Indeed, even as late as 1969, Godard produced his revolutionary pastiche of political agit-prop skits intercut with scenes of the Rolling Stones at work in the recording studio entitled *One Plus One* for a mere $100,000 in 35mm and color, demonstrating that if one could work quickly and effectively as a film director, nearly any project was feasible.

Within the cinematic landscape of the era, precisely what sort of films were being produced under these culturally cataclysmic conditions? For one thing, the film revolution that started in France rapidly spread throughout the globe, with young filmmakers in Britain, India, Italy, Poland, Germany, Mexico, and Japan creating films of strikingly vigorous originality. In England, films like Peter Brook's *Lord of the Flies* (1963), Bryan Forbes's *The L-Shaped Room* (1963), Karel Reisz's *Night Must Fall* (1964), Joseph Losey's *The Servant* (1963), and John Schlesinger's *Darling* (1965) brought a new dimension of frankness to the screen. Most noted for its origination of the "kitchen sink" drama, in which the protagonists of such films as *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) and *A Taste of Honey* (1961) lead drab, dismal lives in surroundings of unrelieved gloom and pessimism, British cinema in the 1960s was turning its attention away from the Gainsborough/Ealing escapism of the 1940s and 1950s to deal with contemporary social issues in a forthright and uncompromising manner.[5] In Poland, Roman Polanski was making a name for himself

with his first feature, *Knife in the Water* (1962), a harrowing tale of a romantic triangle turned violent on a small pleasure yacht. Volker Schlöndorff's *Young Torless* (1966) was paving the way for what would become the New German Cinema, inspiring the early efforts of the German cinéastes Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Jean-Marie Straub.

In the former Czechoslovakia, films such as Evald Schorm's *Courage for Every Day* (1966), Jan Schmidt's *The End of August at the Hotel Ozone* (1966), Vera Chytilová's *Daisies* (1966), Milos Forman's *Loves of a Blonde* (1965), and Jan Kadar's *The Shop on Main Street* (1965), which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 1966, demonstrated that even in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe an entire new generation of filmmakers was coming to power. In Hungary, Miklós Jancsó's *The Round Up* (1965), a brutal political allegory in which a group of peasants are subjected to horrific treatment at the hands of government authorities, brought Jansco's bleak vision of human existence to international prominence. In Italy, Federico Fellini's landmark film *La Dolce Vita* (1960), a sprawling epic chronicling the collapse of post–World War II society as seen through the eyes of a gossip columnist (played with customary brilliance by Marcello Mastroianni), was followed by Fellini's first color film, the sumptuously lyrical *Juliet of the Spirits* (1966), and a young Bernardo Bertolucci created his elegiac paean to lost joys of adolescence in *Before the Revolution* (1964). At the same time, Pier Paolo Pasolini was busily reinventing Italian neorealism with his films of social criticism and religious allegory, including *Mamma Roma* (1962), *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), and *Accattone!* (1961). In Japan, the master director Akira Kurosawa was joined by such younger auteurs as Hiroshi Teshigahara, creator of the international art-house hit *Woman in the Dunes* (1964), Marashiro Shinoda, Kon Ichikawa, and Susumu Hani, all of whom created films that set new precedents for depictions of graphic sexuality and/or violence on the screen.

In Mexico, the globe-hopping Luis Buñuel directed a group of striking low-budget features, including *The Exterminating Angel*

(1962) and *Simon of the Desert* (1964), both trenchant examinations of religious and social hypocrisy among the members of the supposed aristocracy. Canada, which had never entered the international market with any significant impact except for Norman McLaren's short films for the National Film Board of Canada, offered Don Owens's *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (1965), a forthright study of teenage alienation, as well as Wolf Koenig and Roman Kroiter's groundbreaking cinéma vérité short feature *Lonely Boy* (1962), a documentary of a concert tour by pop star Paul Anka, and Arthur Lipsett's savage political satire *Very Nice, Very Nice* (1961), which envisions a society awash in consumerism and the threat of endless nuclear proliferation. In the Netherlands, Nikolai van der Heyde created a stir with his audaciously low-budgeted romance *Spring in Holland* (1966), which documents an affair between a French fashion model and a Dutch racing driver. Made for a mere $40,000 US, the film was compared favorably to the work of Godard and Truffaut, and demonstrated once again that, in the 1960s at least, it was possible to make low-budget 35mm features that were capable of attracting an international audience.[6] And back in Paris Barbet Schroeder, who more recently has become a prolific director of action genre fare (such as the 1998 film *Desperate Measures* with Michael Keaton), produced and acted in the groundbreaking anthology film *Paris vu par . . .* (1965), featuring six short sketches by directors Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, and other members of the New Wave. Shot in 16mm color for less than $100,000, the film was an enormous success at the Cannes Film Festival, and demonstrated that even a relatively young and inexperienced producer (Schroeder was then 25) could get an artistically ambitious project completed with a minimum of expense.

This survey represents a sampling of what the international art cinema of the period had to offer, which, above all other considerations, afforded audiences a more mature, less prudish, and more free-spirited vision of human existence than Hollywood films of the era were willing or able to provide. None of this flurry of international experimentation was lost on Bergman; indeed, he kept

abreast of contemporary developments in the cinema, and his style as a filmmaker changed accordingly. Indeed, after a prolific and successful run of more traditionally staged films in the 1950s, Bergman's filmmaking in the 1960s slowed down a trifle: in 1961, Bergman directed the features *Through a Glass Darkly* and *The Pleasure Garden,* but there is a two-year gap between *Now About These Women* (1964), which might be considered the last of Bergman's "theatrical" films, and his 1966 production of *Persona.*

Further, after *Persona,* Bergman's style as a filmmaker changed utterly. Gone are the cluttered, although atmospheric, nineteenth-century compositions of such films as *The Devil's Eye* (1960), *Wild Strawberries* (1957), and *The Magician* (1958). In their place, in later works such as *Hour of the Wolf* (1966), *Shame* (1967), *The Rite* (1968), *The Passion of Anna* (1969), *Cries and Whispers* (1972), and the brutally penetrating study of marital crisis *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), Bergman presents his audience with an austere and barren landscape in which the protagonists stand naked before the audience, stripped (with the exception of *Cries and Whispers,* the sole period piece in the group) of much of the elaborate costuming and scenery that served as the backdrop for films from his earlier period. *Scenes from a Marriage,* in fact, was shot in 16mm color in a drab, altogether newsreel manner and originally presented as a six-hour miniseries on Swedish television before being cut down by Bergman to 168 minutes for theatrical release. The entire film takes place in apartments, offices, and other quotidian locations; the lighting is direct and utilitarian, the camera work all but invisible. In *Persona* and his later works, before he retreated into childhood memories in his last feature film as director to date, the elegantly overproduced yet curiously empty *Fanny and Alexander* (1983), Bergman was engaged in stripping down his films of all nonessential elements, concentrating on his actors above all, and relegating considerations of conventional spectatorial satisfaction to a nearly nonexistent level of importance in his overall scheme of artistic values. *Persona* remains the most compelling of his later works precisely because it embraces not only the cinematic minimalism of Straub, Fassbinder, and Warhol, but

also because, shooting on location in his own summer house on the island of Fårö, Bergman is working in a place that is his own domicile – a set he has been essentially creating for many years and the site of his long relationship with one of *Persona*'s stars, Liv Ullmann, who lived with Bergman for many years and is the mother of his child. *Persona* is a film of domesticity gone awry, of passion turned to possessive fixation, and of the lack of communication one can experience not only with another person but also with one's inner self.

Indeed, as Bergman recalls, the famous split-face image in *Persona,* in which Nurse Alma's face melts into Elisabet Vogler's, both actresses, viewing the rushes, failed to recognize *themselves* in the artificially congruent image, concentrating instead on the image of the "other."

> We set the [projector] running, and Liv said: "Oh look, what a horrible picture of Bibi!" And Bibi said: "No, it's not me, it's you!" . . . Everyone has a better and worse side, and the picture is a combination of Bibi and Liv's less attractive sides. At first they were so scared they didn't even recognize their own faces.

In the same interview, Bergman also notes that in the studios in Stockholm, where he first began to shoot *Persona,* all of his efforts came to naught.

> The filming [in Stockholm] dragged on, and the results were miserable. But when we went out to Fårö things went fine . . . we were able to fix up the summer house more or less as it had been in Stockholm. The hospital set was arranged in the local museum. [The dreamlike scene in which Elisabet Vogler drifts into Nurse Alma's bedroom was] taken on Fårö. So is the whole crisis between Liv and Bibi. What we'd shot in Stockholm had been an utter failure.[7]

In short, only by embracing the domestic sphere of his own habitation with Liv Ullmann was Bergman able to capture the spiritual essence of the conflict between the two women in *Persona,* a conflict between one who articulates her innermost

thoughts and a "companion" whose interior landscape is, by her own design, a carefully guarded secret. Much has been made of the eventual melding of these two personalities into one deeply conflicted, artificial whole – a union of the mind and soul brought about by personal crisis. Indeed, a number of critics have speculated that both Elisabet Vogler and Nurse Alma represent two sides of the same being, yet Bergman has been extremely specific in disavowing this reading of the film. In the months before he began shooting *Persona,* Bergman had been seriously ill with a successive series of infections that eventually landed him in Sofiahemmet Hospital in Stockholm. Up until that point, he had been working on a two-part film provisionally entitled *The Cannibals,* but his illness forced him to abandon it. Instead, Bergman came up with the idea of *Persona* as a simple concept and "pitched" this new project to Svensk Filmindustri with this very simple narrative structure: "It's about one person who talks and one who doesn't, and they . . . get all mingled up in one another."[8]

On the basis of this slim outline, and after another serious bout of illness and more hospitalization, *Persona* began filming on July 19 at the Svensk Filmindustri studios in Stockholm.

> The first days were nightmarish. All I felt was: "I can't manage this!" And one day after another went by, and all the time we got only bad results, bloody awful results. And Bibi was angry, and Liv was nervous, and I was paralyzed . . .[9]

Originally, in homage to the film's plastic nature, Bergman had wanted to title the film simply *Kinematography* (in reference to the numerous filmic images in *Persona*'s opening montage, which includes scenes from Bergman's 1949 feature film *The Devil's Wanton* – the skeleton popping out of a steamer trunk as part of a bedroom farce – but his producers were adamantly opposed to the idea for commercial reasons. The film was thus conceived as a work with personal, cinematic, and religious (the crucifixion scenes) precedents, all looking toward Bergman's past rather than his future. But with the critical move to Fårö, Bergman was able to create a sparse, minimalist sense of spatial integrity derived from

shooting in an inhabited location. There was no need to build sets; the walls were already constructed. The hospital scenes in the film are absolutely spartan. One can certainly imagine them being filmed in a museum, inasmuch as the set representing Elisabet Vogler's hospital room consists only of a radio, a television set, a hospital bed, and a large expanse of barren wall and floor space. In the uneasily shared world of Elisabet and Alma, their personal relationship with each other and with themselves is a perpetual zone of contestation, a battleground of secrets, deceptions, and shameful memories.

Both Elisabet and Alma live existences marked by their individual limitations. Elisabet is a consummate actress who has chosen not to speak in an attempt, as her psychiatrist puts it, "to live in truth." Nurse Alma, the ostensible caregiver in their superficial nurse/patient relationship, is bored by her rather lackluster relationship with her fiancé and guilty over her participation in an impromptu seaside orgy and a subsequent abortion she is forced to endure as a consequence. Both women are damaged by the exi-

gencies of their mutually unsatisfying existences, yet as long as they remain "in the world" (or "in the studio") these conflicts will be repressed. Only in the zone of domestic intimacy will these long-suppressed emotions erupt with unexpected ferocity precisely because of the safety offered by the idyllic location of the summer house. Only with all other distractions removed (television newscasts, turgid radio melodramas, and all the rest that passes for contemporary popular culture) can the self really come to the surface, and the world which is interiorized in daily social existence assume emotional center stage. In the austerely beautiful, yet implicitly vacant location afforded by Fårö, Bergman found the perfect location for the drama between Elizabet and Alma: a void waiting to be filled with the raw experience of human emotion. The emotional intensity of *Persona* thus comes not only from the performances, but also from Bergman's sense – perhaps inherited from the success of the French New Wave – that when things were going badly in the studio, there was really only one place to move the production: into the isolation of an uninhabited space, a vacation from ordinary social commerce which only serves to highlight the interior crises of Elisabet and Alma.

Thus, in his use of natural locations, in his decisive and crucial rejection of the studio atmosphere, and in his embrace of the cinematic self-reflexivity that *Persona* so transparently revels in, Bergman is moving away from his own professional past toward the future of cinema, as charted by Godard, Truffaut, Oshima, Bertolucci, and the other younger cinéastes we have described, all of whom began their careers in the late 1950s, long after Bergman's apprenticeship at Svensk Filmindustri. Bergman, then, belongs more to the generation of Ford and Welles than Godard, Pasolini, and Resnais, but with *Persona,* he has managed to reinvent himself, appearing anew on the cinematic landscape with an entirely new visual style, a more sophisticated and minimalist sense of decor, and a modernist intensity of purpose that one associates with such contemporary directors as Wim Wenders, Todd Haynes, or Atom Egoyan. Through the judicious use of this new, less theatrical technique, Bergman's career continued to prosper in

the 1970s and 1980s while many other filmmakers of his generation ceased to have active careers. But, simultaneously, as Bergman himself noted, *Persona* was a summing up of his career, the culminating event of his long love affair with the cinema.

Hour of the Wolf (1968), *Shame* (1968), and *Cries and Whispers* (1972) were all substantial international successes for Bergman, but his decisive shift to color cinematography in the early 1970s also brought out his more florid qualities as a director. *Cries and Whispers* is thin but sumptuously photographed and became Bergman's most substantial box-office hit through the unlikely assistance of producer/director Roger Corman, who put up $100,000 of the budget when no other American distributor would underwrite the project. The film was released through Corman's New World Pictures, essentially an exploitation production/distribution company, and was perhaps the first Bergman film to be aggressively marketed on the drive-in circuit. With the surprise American success of *Cries and Whispers,* Bergman was able to enter the last portion of his career, which was interrupted in January 1976, when he was arrested during a rehearsal of Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* at Stockholm's Royal Dramatic Theater for alleged income tax evasion. Bergman was furious, and although the charges were later thrown out, Bergman felt deeply humiliated by the entire event and was hospitalized for a brief period for depression. When he recovered, Bergman shut down his summer home/studio on Fårö and gravitated between Hollywood and Munich, Germany, for the next several years of his life. Inevitably, his artistry suffered.

Bergman had already had one unhappy experience with Hollywood, working on *The Touch* (1971) with Elliot Gould; in an interview in the early 1980s, Bergman claimed that much of the film was actually directed by a young dialogue coach who insisted that each scene be retaken again and again to conform to Hollywood's precise standards of American English pronunciation. As he watched his film being destroyed through excessive retakes that vitiated the energy of his actor's performances, Bergman vowed never to make a film in English again, although, as he noted,

"when I came to Germany, I had to make a picture, *The Serpent's Egg* (1977) – with the original picture in German *and* [Bergman's emphasis] English."[10] In 1978, Bergman directed *Autumn Sonata,* a British/Norwegian film shot almost entirely in the studio, starring Ingrid Bergman, which represented a decisive return to the more artificial and controlled techniques Bergman had employed in his films of the 1950s and 1960s.

Just like Alfred Hitchcock in his final films, especially *Frenzy* (1972) and *Family Plot* (1976), Bergman finds both sanctuary and relief from the exigencies of the real world in the hermetic zone of the studio sound stage. As Bergman admitted, "You know, if you perhaps have seen *Autumn Sonata,* it's all in the studio . . . I think, in *Autumn Sonata,* I have just two scenes outside . . . "[11] This synthetic perfectionism is perhaps understandable from a merely practical point of view; when filming inside, one does not have to worry about rain, clouds, extraneous noises, or other manifestations of the real world. Working in the studio is, in many instances, faster and cheaper, but it is also inherently unreal. Although beautiful effects of stylized lighting and color are certainly possible using interior sets and artificial lighting – and *Autumn Sonata* is certainly a film comprised of gorgeous visuals – one remains detached from the concerns of actual existence, recreating rather than directly experiencing the visual world we communally inhabit.

In July 1978, Bergman at long last returned to Sweden and celebrated his 60th birthday at his summer home on the island of Fårö. He also took up his work again with the Stockholm Royal Dramatic Theater in an attempt to revive his traditional cycle of creative activity: directing a play each winter, then shooting a film in the spring and/or summer. This return to Sweden came only after an extended campaign by government officials, members of the Svensk Filmindustri hierarchy, and other noted Swedish intellectuals. The return of Bergman to his native land was seen as an essential priority by the Swedish government, for although a number of other film directors have emerged from Sweden in the past thirty or forty years (notably Victor Sjöström, Bo Widerberg,

Jörn Donner, Jan Troell, Lasse Hallström, Lars von Trier, and Bille August), none of these figures (with the possible exception of von Trier, whose films *Zentropa* [1991] and *Breaking the Waves* [1996] have attracted a high degree of international attention, not to say notoriety) has achieved the worldwide fame of Ingmar Bergman. Indeed, Bergman's arrest for tax charges in the mid-1970s, coupled with the effects of a widespread strike by film technicians during the same period, signaled the beginning of the end of the golden age of Swedish cinema. From an average of forty features per year during the 1940s, production of new films in the 1980s remained distressingly low, from between fifteen to twenty new projects annually. Lasse Hallström's *My Life as a Dog* (1985), a tender coming-of-age story, was a modest international art-house hit, but the era in which Swedish cinema could compete with the international cinemas of France, England, Germany, and other European nations was clearly over.

In 1983, Bergman released *Fanny and Alexander,* an elegiac and unexpectedly romantic film set in Sweden in the early 1900s, a film both obviously autobiographical and more reflective than his previous works. Devoid of Bergman's characteristically bleak outlook, *Fanny and Alexander* is in many ways the ideal "studio" film, recalling the precisely controlled images of Max Ophuls, Federico Fellini, or Luchino Visconti. Because the film was more restrained and certainly less challenging than his previous work, it concomitantly became perhaps Bergman's biggest international success, winning the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film as well as Oscars for Cinematography, Art Direction, and Costume Design, a sure sign that Bergman's more muted and accessible style was pleasing to mass audiences. *Fanny and Alexander* was announced as Bergman's final film, but he made one more television project, *After the Rehearsal* (1984), which was eventually given a theatrical release, and then ceased to direct films altogether. In 1992, Bergman's script for the film *The Best Intentions* was brought to the screen by director Bille August, originally as a six-part, six-hour miniseries for Swedish television. Centering on the tempestuous lives of Bergman's parents, this autobiographical project suggests

strongly that in his final years, Bergman is attempting to come to terms with the forces and personalities that have shaped his life and art. Born in 1918, Bergman is now more than 80 years old, and it seems that his career has finally come full circle, returning to the events of his youth and Swedish society at the turn of the century. The passion and pessimism that informed the creation of his earlier films has resolved itself in an embrace of memory, a coming to terms with the past in which Bergman contemplates (with some degree of serenity) his own mortality.

Yet it is undoubtedly for his earlier work as a director that Bergman will be remembered, and many feel that *Persona* remains, in many respects, the key work of his long and illustrious career. Bergman's key collaborators have gone on to long careers of their own. Sven Nykvist has become one of the world's top directors of photography; Liv Ullmann long ago left the island of Fårö for international stardom in a variety of projects. For some observers, Bergman's early films, particularly *The Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries,* remain his finest works, austere in their structure and execution, yet belonging, to my mind, more properly to the realm of the theater than the cinema. With *Persona,* Bergman made the final leap to join the younger members of the international cinematic fraternity by embracing the plastic and kinetic possibilities inherent within the realm of film. Were it not for his age, Bergman (like Godard) would probably now be comfortably working in video, creating a new series of deeply personal and certainly self-revelatory films, delving deeper into the recesses of his past. There is, nevertheless, no doubt that *Persona* is one of Bergman's finest and most accomplished films, and perhaps the key film of Bergman's later work as an artist. It is also one of the finest and most elusive films ever made. Bergman absorbed the technical expertise of the New Wave filmmakers and made it his own; in his final films, it is perhaps understandable that he returned to the theatrical classicism that provided the structure for his earlier works. *Persona* remains a one of a kind film for Bergman. Naturalistic and yet ephemeral, character driven and yet deeply involved with the mysteries of the cinematograph, with Liv Ullmann's tour

de force performance as the eternally silent, perpetually surveillant Elisabet Vogler as its centerpiece (and perhaps a metaphor for Bergman's own intense scrutiny of the human condition in all his films), *Persona* is at once a deeply personal and yet supremely accessible film, an allegory of sound and silence, light and darkness, presence and absence.

NOTES

1. See Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), for an overview of Godard's life and work.
2. See Roy Armes, *French Film* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), for more information on the French New Wave cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s.
3. See James Monaco, *The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), for more information on these New Wave filmmakers.
4. See Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), the landmark text that began the work of reevaluating the films of classic American and European directors.
5. See Roger Manvell, *New Cinema in Britain* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), and Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1992), for more on the films of this era.
6. Peter Cowie, ed., *International Film Guide 1967* (London: Tantivy Press, 1966), 120–121. See also Elkan Allan, *A Guide to World Cinema* (London: Whittet Books in association with the British Film Institute, 1985); David Robinson, *The History of World Cinema* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973); Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ed., *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); William Luhr, ed., *World Cinema Since 1945* (New York: Ungar, 1987), for more on these films and filmmakers.
7. Stig Björkman, Torsten Manns, and Jonas Sima, *Bergman on Bergman,* translated by Paul Britten Austin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 202–203.
8. Ibid., 196.
9. Ibid., 198.
10. G. William Jones, *Talking with Ingmar Bergman* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1983), 66.
11. Jones, 27, 31.

3 Bergman's *Persona*

One impulse is to take Bergman's masterpiece for granted. Since 1960 at least, with the breakthrough into new narrative forms propagated with most notoriety (if not greatest distinction) by *Last Year in Marienbad,* film audiences have continued to be educated by the elliptical and complex. As Resnais' imagination was subsequently to surpass itself in *Muriel,* a succession of ever more difficult and accomplished films have turned up in recent years. But such good fortune releases nobody who cares about films from acclaiming work as original and triumphant as *Persona.* It is depressing that this film has received only a fraction of the attention it deserves since it opened in New York, London, and Paris.

To be sure, some of the paltriness of the critics' reaction may be more a response to the signature that *Persona* carries than to the film itself. That signature has come to mean a prodigal, tirelessly productive career; a rather facile, often merely beautiful, by now (it seemed) almost oversize body of work; a lavishly inventive, sensual, yet melodramatic talent, employed with what appeared to be a certain complacency, and prone to embarrassing displays of intellectual bad taste. From the Fellini of the North, exacting filmgoers could hardly be blamed for not expecting, ever, a truly great film. But *Persona* happily forces one to put aside such dismissive preconceptions about its author.

"Bergman's *Persona*" from STYLES OF RADICAL WILL by Susan Sontag. Copyright © 1969 by Susan Sontag. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc.

The rest of the neglect of *Persona* may be set down to emotional squeamishness; the film, like much of Bergman's recent work, bears an almost defiling charge of personal agony. This is particularly true of *The Silence* – most accomplished, by far, of the films Bergman has made before this one. And *Persona* draws liberally on the themes and schematic cast established in *The Silence.* (The principal characters in both films are two women bound together in a passionate agonized relationship, one of whom has a pitiably neglected small son. Both films take up the themes of the scandal of the erotic; the polarities of violence and powerlessness, reason and unreason, language and silence, the intelligible and the unintelligible.) But Bergman's new film ventures at least as much beyond *The Silence* as that film is an advance, in its emotional power and subtlety, over all his previous work.

That achievement gives, for the present moment, the measure of a work which is undeniably "difficult." *Persona* is bound to trouble, perplex, and frustrate most filmgoers – at least as much as *Marienbad* did in its day. Or so one would suppose. But, heaping imperturbability upon indifference, critical reaction to *Persona* has shied away from associating anything very baffling with the film. The critics have allowed, mildly, that the latest Bergman is unnecessarily obscure. Some add that this time he's overdone the mood of unremitting bleakness. It's intimated that with this film he has ventured out of his depth, exchanging art for artiness. But the difficulties and rewards of *Persona* are much more formidable than such banal objections would suggest.

Of course, evidence of these difficulties is available anyway – even in the absence of more pertinent controversy. Why else all the discrepancies and just plain misrepresentations in the accounts given by critics of what actually happens during the film? Like *Marienbad, Persona* seems defiantly obscure. Its general look has nothing of the built-in, abstract evocativeness of the chateau in Resnais' film; the space and furnishings of *Persona* are anti-romantic, cool, mundane, clinical (in one sense, literally so), and bourgeois-modern. But no less of a mystery is lodged in this setting. Actions and dialogue are given which the viewer is bound

to find puzzling, being unable to decipher whether certain scenes take place in the past, present, or future; and whether certain images and episodes belong to reality or fantasy.

One common approach to a film presenting difficulties of this now familiar sort is to treat such distinctions as irrelevant and rule that the film is actually all of one piece. This usually means situating the action of the film in a merely (or wholly) mental universe. But this approach only covers over the difficulty, it seems to me. *Within* the structure of what is shown, the elements continue being related to each other in the ways that originally suggested to the viewer that some events were realistic while others were visionary (whether fantasy, dream, hallucination, or extra-worldly visitation). Causal connections observed in one portion of the film are still being flouted in another part; the film still gives several equally persuasive but mutually exclusive explanations of the same event. These discordant internal relations only get transposed, intact, but not reconciled, when the whole film is relocated in the mind. I should argue that it is no more helpful to describe *Persona* as a wholly subjective film – an action taking place within a single character's head – than it was (how easy to see that now) in elucidating *Marienbad,* a film whose disregard for conventional chronology and a clearly delineated border between fantasy and reality could scarcely have constituted more of a provocation than *Persona.*

But neither is it any sounder to approach this film in search of an objective narrative, ignoring the fact that *Persona* is strewn with signs that cancel each other. Even the most skillful attempt to arrange a single, plausible anecdote out of the film must leave out or contradict some of its key sections, images, and procedures. Attempted less skillfully, it has led to the flat, impoverished, and partly inaccurate account of Bergman's film promulgated by most reviewers and critics.

According to this account, *Persona* is a psychological chamber drama which chronicles the relation between two women. One is a successful actress, evidently in her mid-thirties, named Elizabeth

Vogler (Liv Ullmann), now suffering from an enigmatic mental collapse whose chief symptoms are muteness and a near-catatonic lassitude. The other is the pretty young nurse of twenty-five named Alma (Bibi Andersson) charged with caring for Elizabeth – first at the mental hospital and then at the beach cottage loaned to them for this purpose by the woman psychiatrist at the hospital who is Elizabeth's doctor and Alma's supervisor. What happens in the course of the film, according to the critics' consensus, is that, through some mysterious process, the two women exchange identities. The ostensibly stronger one, Alma, becomes weaker, gradually assuming the problems and confusions of her patient, while the sick woman felled by despair (or psychosis) eventually regains her power of speech and returns to her former life. (We don't see this exchange consummated. What is shown at the end of *Persona* looks like an agonized stalemate. But it was reported that the film, until shortly before it was released, contained a brief closing scene that showed Elizabeth on the stage again, apparently completely recovered. From this, presumably, the viewer could infer that the nurse was now mute and had taken on the burden of Elizabeth's despair.)

Proceeding from this constructed version, half "story" and half "meaning," critics have read off a number of further meanings. Some regard the transaction between Elizabeth and Alma as illustrating an impersonal law that operates intermittently in human affairs; no ultimate responsibility pertains to either of them. Others posit a conscious cannibalism of the innocent Alma by the actress – and thus read the film as a parable of the predatory, demonic energies of the artist, incorrigibly scavenging life for raw material.[1] Other critics move quickly to an even more general plane, extracting from *Persona* a diagnosis of the contemporary dissociation of personality, a demonstration of the inevitable failure of good will and trust, and predictable correct views on such matters as the alienated affluent society, the nature of madness, psychiatry and its limitations, the American war on Vietnam, the Western legacy of sexual guilt, and the Six Million. (Then the critics often go on, as Michel Cournot did several months ago in *Le*

Nouvel Observateur, to chide Bergman for this vulgar didacticism which they have imputed to him.)

But even when turned into a story, I think, this prevailing account of *Persona* grossly oversimplifies and misrepresents. True, Alma does seem to grow progressively more insecure, more vulnerable; in the course of the film she is reduced to fits of hysteria, cruelty, anxiety, childish dependence, and (probably) delusion. It's also true that Elizabeth gradually becomes stronger, that is, more active, more responsive; though her change is far subtler and, until virtually the end, she still refuses to speak. But all this is hardly tantamount to the "exchange" of attributes and identities that critics have glibly spoken of. Nor is it established, as most critics have assumed, that Alma, however much she does come with pain and longing to identify herself with the actress, takes on Elizabeth's dilemmas, whatever those may be. (They're far from made clear.)

My own view is that the temptation to invent more story ought to be resisted. Take, for instance, the scene that starts with the abrupt presence of a middle-aged man wearing dark glasses (Gunnar Björnstrand) near the beach cottage where Elizabeth and Alma have been living in isolation. All we see is that he approaches Alma, addressing her and continuing to call her, despite her protests, by the name Elizabeth; that he tries to embrace her, ignoring her struggle to free herself; that throughout this scene Elizabeth's impassive face is never more than a few inches away; that Alma suddenly yields to his embraces, saying, "Yes, I am Elizabeth" (Elizabeth is still watching intently), and goes to bed with him amid a torrent of endearments. Then we see the two women together (shortly after?); they are alone, behaving as if nothing has happened. This sequence can be taken as illustrating Alma's growing identification with Elizabeth, and gauging the extent of the process by which Alma is learning (really? in her imagination?) to become Elizabeth. While Elizabeth has perhaps voluntarily renounced being an actress by becoming mute, Alma is involuntarily and painfully engaged in becoming that Elizabeth Vogler, the performer, who no longer exists. Still, nothing we see justifies describing this scene as a real event – something happening in the

course of the plot on the same level as the initial removal of the two women to the beach cottage.[2] But neither can we be absolutely sure that this, or something like it, isn't taking place. After all, we do see it happening. (And it's the nature of cinema to confer on all events, without indications to the contrary, an equivalent degree of reality: everything shown on the screen is *there,* present.)

The difficulty of *Persona* stems from the fact that Bergman withholds the kind of clear signals for sorting out fantasies from reality offered, for example, by Buñuel in *Belle de Jour.* Buñuel puts in the clues; he wants the viewer to be able to decipher his film. The insufficiency of the clues Bergman has planted must be taken to indicate that he intends the film to remain partly encoded. The viewer can only move toward, but never achieve, certainty about the action. However, so far as the distinction between fantasy and reality is of any use in understanding *Persona,* I should argue that much more than the critics have allowed of what happens in and around the beach cottage is most plausibly understood as Alma's fantasy. One prime bit of evidence for this thesis is a sequence

occurring soon after the two women arrive at the seaside. It's the sequence in which, after we have seen Elizabeth enter Alma's room and stand beside her and stroke her hair, we see Alma, pale, troubled, asking Elizabeth the next morning, "Did you come to my room last night?" and Elizabeth, slightly quizzical, anxious, shaking her head no. The viewer isn't given any evidence of a malevolent plan on Elizabeth's part to undermine Alma's confidence in her own sanity; nor any evidence for doubting Elizabeth's memory or sanity in the ordinary sense. But if that is the case, two important points have been established early in the film. One is that Alma is hallucinating – and, presumably, will continue doing so. The other is that hallucinations or visions will appear on the screen with the same rhythms, the same look of objective reality as something "real." (However, some clues, too complex to describe here, are given in the lighting of certain scenes.) And once these points are granted, it seems highly plausible to take at least the scene with Elizabeth's husband as Alma's fantasy, as well as several scenes which depict a charged, trancelike physical contact between the two women.

But sorting out what is fantasy from what is real in *Persona* (i.e., what Alma imagines from what may be taken as really happening) is a minor achievement. And it quickly becomes a misleading one, unless subsumed under the larger issue of the form of exposition or narration employed by the film. As I have already suggested, *Persona* is constructed according to a form that resists being reduced to a story – say, the story about the relation (however ambiguous and abstract) between two women named Elizabeth and Alma, a patient and a nurse, a star and an ingenue, *alma* (soul) and *persona* (mask). Such reduction to a story means, in the end, a reduction of Bergman's film to the single dimension of psychology. Not that the psychological dimension isn't there. It is. But to understand *Persona,* the viewer must go beyond the psychological point of view.

This seems mandatory because Bergman allows the audience to interpret Elizabeth's mute condition in several different ways – as involuntary mental breakdown and as voluntary moral decision

leading either toward a self-purification or toward suicide. But whatever the background of her condition, Bergman wishes to involve the viewer much more in the sheer fact of it than in its causes. In *Persona,* muteness is first of all a fact with a certain psychic and moral weight, a fact which initiates its own kind of psychic and moral causality upon an "other."

I am inclined to impute a privileged status to the speech made by the psychiatrist to Elizabeth before she departs with Alma to the beach cottage. The psychiatrist tells the silent, stony-faced Elizabeth that she has understood her case. She has grasped that Elizabeth wants to be sincere, not to play a role, not to lie; to make the inner and the outer come together. And that, having rejected suicide as a solution, she has decided to be mute. The psychiatrist concludes by advising Elizabeth to bide her time and live her experience through, predicting that eventually the actress will renounce her muteness and return to the world. . . . But even if one treats this speech as setting forth a privileged view, it would be a mistake to take it as the key to *Persona;* or even to assume that the psychiatrist's thesis wholly explains Elizabeth's condition. (The doctor could be wrong, or, at the least, be simplifying the matter.) By placing this speech so early in the film (even earlier, a superficial account of Elizabeth's symptoms is addressed to Alma when the doctor first assigns her to the case), and by never referring explicitly to this "explanation" again, Bergman has, in effect, both taken account of psychology and dispensed with it. Without ruling out psychological explanation, he consigns to a relatively minor place any consideration of the role the actress's *motives* have in the action.

Persona takes a position beyond psychology – as it does, in an analogous sense, beyond eroticism. It certainly contains the materials of an erotic subject, such as the "visit" of Elizabeth's husband that ends with his going to bed with Alma while Elizabeth looks on. There is, above all, the connection between the two women themselves which, in its feverish proximity, its caresses, its sheer passionateness (avowed by Alma in word, gesture, and fantasy) could hardly fail, it would seem, to suggest a powerful, if largely

inhibited, sexual involvement. But, in fact, what might be sexual in feeling is largely transposed into something beyond sexuality, beyond eroticism even. The most purely sexual episode in the film is the scene in which Alma, sitting across the room from Elizabeth, tells the story of an impromptu beach orgy; Alma speaks, transfixed, reliving the memory and at the same time consciously delivering up this shameful secret to Elizabeth as her greatest gift of love. Entirely through discourse and without any resort to images (through a flashback), a violent sexual atmosphere is generated. But this sexuality has nothing to do with the "present" of the film, and the relationship between the two women. In this respect, *Persona* makes a remarkable modification of the structure of *The Silence*. In the earlier film, the love-hate relationship between the two sisters projected an unmistakable sexual energy – particularly the feelings of the older sister (Ingrid Thulin). In *Persona,* Bergman has achieved a more interesting situation by delicately excising or transcending the possible sexual implications of the tie between the two women. It is a remarkable feat of moral and psychological poise. While maintaining the indeterminacy of the situation (from a psychological point of view), Bergman does not give the impression of evading the issue, and presents nothing that is psychologically improbable.

The advantages of keeping the psychological aspects of *Persona* indeterminate (while internally credible) are that Bergman can do many other things besides tell a story. Instead of a full-blown story, he presents something that is, in one sense, cruder and, in another, more abstract: a body of material, a subject. The function of the subject or material may be as much its opacity, its multiplicity, as the ease with which it yields itself to being incarnated in a determinate action or plot.

In a work constituted along these principles, the action would appear intermittent, porous, shot through intimations of absence, of what could not be univocally said. This doesn't mean that the narration has forfeited "sense." But it does mean that sense isn't necessarily tied to a determinate plot. Alternatively, there is the possibility of an extended narration composed of events that are

not (wholly) explicated but are, nevertheless, possible and may even have taken place. The forward movement of such a narrative might be measured by reciprocal relations between its parts – for example, displacements – rather than by ordinary realistic (mainly psychological) causality. There might exist what could be called a dormant plot. Still, critics have better things to do than ferret out the story line as if the author had – through mere clumsiness or error or frivolity or lack of craft – concealed it. In such narratives, it is a question not of a plot that has been mislaid but of one that has been (at least in part) annulled. That intention, whether conscious on the artist's part or merely implicit in the work, should be taken at face value and respected.

Take the matter of information. One tactic upheld by traditional narrative is to give "full" information (by which I mean all that is needed, according to the standard of relevance set up in the "world" proposed by the narrative), so that the ending of the viewing or reading experience coincides, ideally, with full satisfaction of one's desire to know, to understand what happened and why. (This is, of course, a highly manipulated quest for knowledge. The business of the artist is to convince his audience that what they haven't learned at the end they *can't* know, or shouldn't *care* about knowing.) In contrast, one of the salient features of new narratives is a deliberate, calculated frustration of the desire to know. Did anything happen last year at Marienbad? What did become of the girl in *L'avventura?* Where is Alma going when she boards a bus alone toward the close of *Persona?*

Once it is conceived that the desire to know may be (in part) systematically thwarted, the old expectations about plotting no longer hold. Such films (or comparable works of prose fiction) can't be expected to supply many of the familiar satisfactions of traditional narrations, such as being "dramatic." At first it may seem that a plot still remains, only it's being related at an oblique, uncomfortable angle, where vision is obscured. Actually, the plot isn't there at all in the old sense; the point of these new works is not to tantalize but to involve the audience more directly in other matters, for instance, in the very processes of knowing and seeing. (An eminent precursor of this concept of narration is Flaubert; the

persistent use of off-center detail in the descriptions in *Madame Bovary* is one instance of the method.)

The result of the new narration, then, is a tendency to de-dramatize. *Journey to Italy,* for example, tells what is ostensibly a story. But it is a story which proceeds by omissions. The audience is being haunted, as it were, by the sense of a lost or absent meaning to which even the artist himself has no access. The avowal of agnosticism on the artist's part may look like frivolity or contempt for the audience. Antonioni enraged many people by saying that he didn't know himself what happened to the missing girl in *L'avventura* – whether she had, for instance, committed suicide or run away. But this attitude should be taken with the utmost seriousness. When the artist declares that he "knows" no more than the audience does, he is saying that all the meaning resides in the work itself, that there is nothing "behind" it. Such works seem to lack sense or meaning only to the extent that entrenched critical attitudes have established as a dictum for the narrative arts (cinema as well as prose literature) that meaning resides solely in this surplus of "reference" outside the work – to the "real world" or to the artist's "intention." But this is, at best, an arbitrary ruling. The meaning of a narration is not identical with a paraphrase of the values associated by an ideal audience with the "real-life" equivalents or sources of the plot elements, or with the attitudes projected by the artist toward these elements. Neither is meaning (whether in films, fiction, or theatre) a function of a determinate plot. Other kinds of narration are possible besides those based on a story, in which the fundamental problem is the treatment of the plot line and the construction of characters. For instance, the material can be treated as a *thematic resource,* one from which different (and perhaps concurrent) narrative structures are derived as variations. But inevitably, the formal mandates of such a construction must differ from those of a story (or even a set of parallel stories). The difference will probably appear most striking in the treatment of time.

A story involves the audience in what happens, how a situation comes out. Movement is decisively linear, whatever the meanderings and digressions. One moves from A to B, then to look for-

ward to C, even as C (if the affair is satisfactorily managed) points one's interest in the direction of D. Each link in the chain is, so to speak, self-abolishing – once it has served its turn. In contrast, the development of a theme-and-variation narrative is much less linear. The linear movement can't be altogether suppressed, since the experience of the work remains an event in time (the time of viewing or reading). But this forward movement can be sharply qualified by a competing retrograde principle, which could take the form, say, of continual backward- and cross-references. Such a work would invite reexperiencing, multiple viewing. It would ask the spectator or reader ideally to position himself simultaneously at several different points in the narrative.

Such a demand, characteristic of theme-and-variation narratives, obviates the necessity of establishing a conventional chronological scheme. Instead, time may appear in the guise of a perpetual present; or events may form a conundrum which makes it impossible to distinguish exactly between past, present, and future. *Marienbad* and Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle* are stringent examples of the latter procedure. In *Persona,* Bergman uses a mixed approach. While the treatment of time sequence in the body of the film seems roughly realistic or chronological, at the beginning and close of the film distinctions of "before" and "after" are drastically bleached out, almost indecipherable.

In my own view, the construction of *Persona* is best described in terms of this variations-on-a-theme form. The theme is that of *doubling;* the variations are those that follow from the leading possibilities of that theme (on both a formal and a psychological level) such as duplication, inversion, reciprocal exchange, unity and fission, and repetition. The action cannot be univocally paraphrased. It's correct to speak of *Persona* as relating the duel between two mythical parts of a single self: the corrupted person who acts (Elizabeth) and the ingenuous soul (Alma) who founders in contact with corruption.

A sub-theme of doubling is the contrast between hiding and showing forth. The Latin word *persona,* from which the English "person" derives, means the mask worn by an actor. To be a person, then, is to possess a mask; and in *Persona,* both women wear

masks. Elizabeth's mask is her muteness. Alma's mask is her health, her optimism, her normal life (she is engaged; she likes and is good at her work, etc.). But in the course of the film, both masks crack.

To summarize this drama by saying that the violence that the actress has done to herself is transferred to Alma is too simple. Violence and the sense of horror and impotence are, more truly, the residual experiences of consciousness subjected to an ordeal. By not just telling a "story" about the psychic ordeal of two women, Bergman is using that ordeal as a constituent element of his main theme. And that theme of doubling appears to be no less a formal idea than a psychological one. As I have already stressed, Bergman has withheld enough information about the story of the two women to make it impossible to determine clearly the main outlines, much less all, of what passes between them. Further, he has introduced a number of reflections about the nature of representation (the status of the image, of the word, of action, of the film medium itself.) *Persona* is not just a representation of transactions between the two characters, Alma and Elizabeth, but a meditation on the film which is "about" them.

The most explicit parts of this meditation are the opening and closing sequences, in which Bergman tries to create the film as an object: a finite object, a made object, a fragile, perishable object, and therefore something existing in space as well as time.

Persona begins with darkness. Then two points of light gradually gain in brightness, until we see that they're the two carbons of the arc lamp; after this, a portion of the leader flashes by. Then follows a suite of rapid images, some barely identifiable – a chase scene from a slapstick silent film; an erect penis; a nail being hammered into the palm of a hand; a view from the rear of a stage of a heavily made-up actress declaiming to the footlights and darkness beyond (we see this image soon again and know that it's Elizabeth playing her last role, that of Electra); the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk in South Vietnam; assorted dead bodies in a morgue. All these images go by very rapidly, mostly too fast to see; but gradually they slow down, as if consenting to adjust to the duration in

which the viewer can comfortably perceive. Then follow the final set of images – run off at normal speed. We see a thin, unhealthy-looking boy around eleven lying prone under a sheet on a hospital cot against the wall of a bare room; the viewer at first is bound to associate to the corpses just shown. But the boy stirs, awkwardly kicks off the sheet, turns on his stomach, puts on a pair of large round glasses, takes out a book, and begins to read. Then we see before him an indecipherable blur, very faint, but on its way to becoming an image, the larger-than-life but never very distinct face of a beautiful woman. Slowly, tentatively, as in a trance, the boy reaches up and begins to caress the image. (The surface he touches suggests a movie screen, but also a portrait and a mirror.)

Who is that boy? Most people have assumed he is Elizabeth's son, because we learn later that she does have a son (whose snapshot she tears up when her husband sends it to her in the hospital) and because they think the face on the screen is the actress's face. Actually, it isn't. Not only is the image far from clear (this is obviously deliberate) but Bergman modulates the image back and forth between Elizabeth's face and Alma's. If only for this reason, it seems facile to assign the boy a literal identity. Rather, I think, his identity is something we shouldn't expect to know.

In any case, the boy is not seen again until the close of the film when more briefly, after the action is finished, there is a complementary montage of fragmented images, ending with the child again reaching caressingly toward the huge blurry blow-up of a woman's face. Then Bergman cuts to the shot of the incandescent arc lamp, showing the reverse of the phenomenon which opens the film. The carbons begin to fade; slowly the light goes out. The film dies, as it were, before our eyes. It dies as an object or a thing does, declaring itself to be used up, and thereby virtually independent of the volition of the maker.

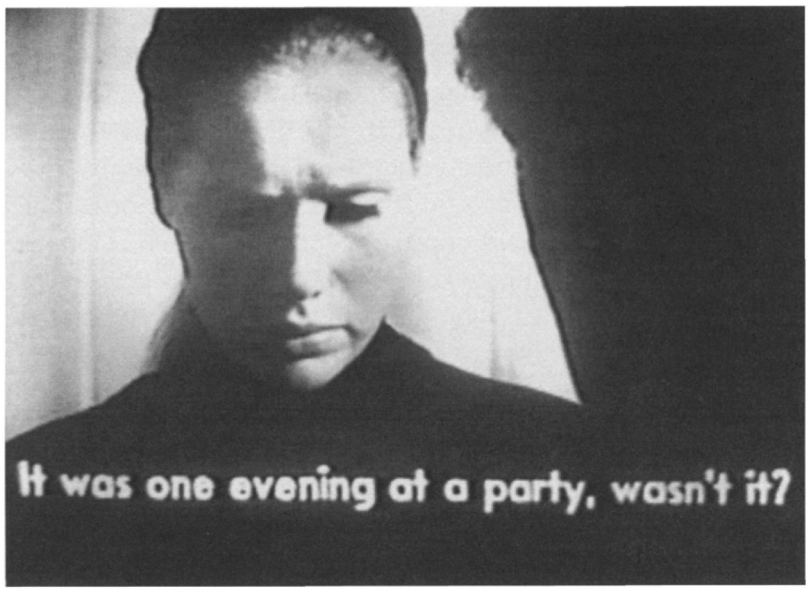
Any account which leaves out or dismisses as incidental how *Persona* begins and ends hasn't been talking about the film that Bergman made. Far from being extraneous or pretentious, as many reviewers found it, the so-called frame of *Persona* is, it seems to

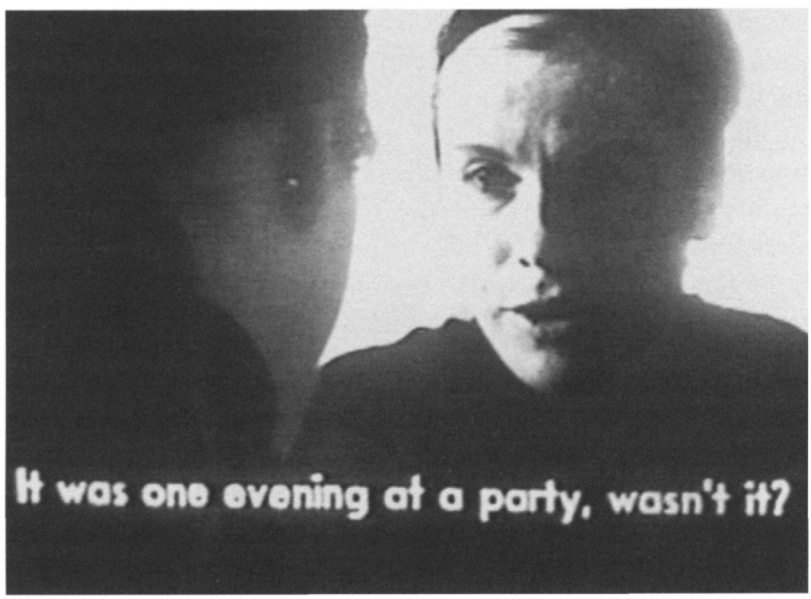
me, a central statement of the motif of aesthetic self-reflexiveness that runs through the entire film. The element of self-reflexiveness in *Persona* is anything but an arbitrary concern, one superadded to the dramatic action. For one thing, it is the most explicit statement on the formal level of the theme of doubling or duplication present on a psychological level in the transactions between Alma and Elizabeth. The formal "doublings" in *Persona* are the largest extension of the theme of doubling which furnishes the material of the film.

Perhaps the most striking single episode, in which the formal and psychological resonances of the double theme are played out most starkly, is Alma's long description of Elizabeth's maternity and her relation to her son. This monologue is repeated twice in its entirety, the first time showing Elizabeth as she listens, the second time showing Alma as she speaks. The sequence ends spectacularly, with the close-up of a double or composite face, half Elizabeth's and half Alma's.

Here Bergman is pointing up the paradoxical promise of film – namely, that it always gives the illusion of a voyeuristic access to an untampered reality, a neutral view of things as they are. What is filmed is always, in some sense, a "document." But what contemporary filmmakers more and more often show is the process of seeing itself, giving grounds or evidence for several different ways of seeing the same thing, which the viewer may entertain concurrently or successively.

Bergman's use of this idea in *Persona* is strikingly original, but the larger intention is a familiar one. In the ways that Bergman made his film self-reflexive, self-regarding, ultimately self-engorging, we should recognize not a private whim but the expression of a well-established tendency. For it is precisely the energy for this sort of "formalist" concern with the nature and paradoxes of the medium itself which was unleashed when the nineteenth-century formal structures of plot and characters (with their presumption of a much less complex reality than that envisaged by the contemporary consciousness) were demoted. What is commonly patronized


It was one evening at a party, wasn't it?


It was one evening at a party, wasn't it?

as an overexquisite self-consciousness in contemporary art, leading to a species of auto-cannibalism, can be seen – less pejoratively – as the liberation of new energies of thought and sensibility.

This, for me, is the promise behind the familiar thesis that locates the difference between traditional and new cinema in the altered status of the camera. In the aesthetic of traditional films, the camera tried to remain unperceived, to efface itself before the spectacle it was rendering. In contrast, what counts as new cinema can be recognized, as Pasolini has remarked, by the "felt presence of the camera." (Needless to say, new cinema doesn't mean just cinema of this last decade. To cite only two predecessors, recall Vertov's *The Man with the Camera* [1929], with its Pirandellian playfulness with the contrast between film as a physical object and film as the live image, and Benjamin Christensen's *Haxan* [1921], with its leap back and forth between fiction and journalistic documentary.) But Bergman goes beyond Pasolini's criterion, inserting into the viewer's consciousness the felt present of the film as an object. This happens not only at the beginning and end but in the middle of *Persona,* when the image – a shot of Alma's horrified face – cracks, like a mirror, then burns. When the next scene begins immediately afterward (as if nothing had happened), the viewer has not only an almost indelible after-image of Alma's anguish but a sense of added shock, a formal-magical apprehension of the film, as if it had collapsed under the weight of registering such drastic suffering and then had been, as it were, magically reconstituted.

Bergman's intention, in the beginning and end of *Persona* and in this terrifying caesura in the middle, is quite different from – indeed, it is the romantic opposite of – Brecht's intention of alienating the audience by supplying continual reminders that what they are watching is theatre. Bergman seems only marginally concerned with the thought that it might be salutary for audiences to be reminded that they are watching a film (an artifact, something made), not reality. Rather, he is making a statement about the complexity of what can be represented, an assertion that the deep, unflinching knowledge of anything will in the end

prove destructive. A character in Bergman's films who perceives something intensely eventually consumes what he knows, uses it up, is forced to move on to other things.

This principle of intensity at the root of Bergman's sensibility determines the specific ways in which he uses new narrative forms. Anything like the vivacity of Godard, the intellectual innocence of *Jules and Jim,* the lyricism of Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution* and Skolimowski's *Le Départ* are outside his range. Bergman's work is characterized by slowness, deliberateness of pacing – something like the heaviness of Flaubert. Hence, the excruciatingly unmodulated quality of *Persona* (and of *The Silence* before it), a quality only very superficially described as pessimism. It is not that Bergman is pessimistic about life and the human situation – as if it were a question of certain opinions – but rather that the quality of his sensibility, when he is faithful to it, has only a single subject: the depths in which consciousness drowns. If the maintenance of personality requires safeguarding the integrity of masks, and the truth about a person always means his unmasking, cracking the mask, then the truth about life as a whole is the shattering of the whole facade – behind which lies an absolute cruelty.

It is here, I think, that one must locate the ostensibly political allusions in *Persona.* Bergman's references to Vietnam and the Six Million are quite different from the references to the Algerian War, Vietnam, China in the films of Godard. Unlike Godard, Bergman is not a topical or historically oriented filmmaker. Elizabeth watching a newsreel on TV of a bonze in Saigon immolating himself, or staring at the famous photograph of a little boy from the Warsaw Ghetto being led off to be slaughtered, are, for Bergman, above all, images of total violence, of unredeemed cruelty. They occur in *Persona* as images of what cannot be imaginatively encompassed or digested, rather than as occasions for right political and moral thoughts. In their function, these images don't differ from the earlier flashbacks of a palm into which a nail is being hammered or of the anonymous bodies in a morgue. History or politics enters *Persona* only in the form of pure violence. Bergman makes an "aesthetic" use of violence – far from ordinary left-liberal propaganda.

The subject of *Persona* is the violence of the spirit. If the two women violate each other, each can be said to have at least as profoundly violated herself. In the final parallel to this theme, the film itself seems to be violated – to emerge out of and descend back into the chaos of "cinema" and film-as-object.

Bergman's film, profoundly upsetting, at moments terrifying, relates the horror of the dissolution of personality: Alma crying out to Elizabeth at one point, "I'm not you!" And it depicts the complementary horror of the theft (whether voluntary or involuntary is left unclear) of personality, which mythically is rendered as vampirism: we see Elizabeth kissing Alma's neck; at one point, Alma sucks Elizabeth's blood. Of course, the theme of the vampiristic exchanges of personal substance needn't be treated as a horror story. Think of the very different emotional range of this material in Henry James' *The Sacred Fount.* The most obvious difference between James' treatment and Bergman's is in the degree of felt suffering that is represented. For all their undeniably dis-

agreeable aura, the vampiristic exchanges between the characters in James' late novel are represented as partly voluntary and, in some obscure way, just. Bergman rigorously excludes the realm of justice (in which characters get what they "deserve"). The spectator is not furnished, from some reliable outside point of view, with any idea of the true moral standing of Elizabeth and Alma; their enmeshment is a given, not the result of some prior situation we are allowed to understand; the mood is one of desperation, in which all attributions of voluntariness seem superficial. All we are given is a set of compulsions or gravitations, in which the two women founder, exchanging "strength" and "weakness."

But perhaps the main difference between Bergman's and James' treatment of this theme derives from their contrasting position with respect to language. As long as discourse continues in the James novel, the texture of the person continues. The continuity of language constitutes a bridge over the abyss of the loss of personality, the foundering of the personality in absolute despair. But in *Persona,* it is precisely language – its continuity – which is put in

question. (Bergman is the more modern artist, and cinema is the natural home of those who suspect language, a ready vehicle for the vast weight of suspicion lodged in the contemporary sensibility against "the word." As the purification of language has become the particular task of modernist poetry and of prose writers like Stein, Beckett, and Robbe-Grillet, much of the new cinema has become a vehicle for those wishing to demonstrate the futility and duplicities of language.) The theme had already appeared in *The Silence,* with the incomprehensible language into which the translator sister descends, unable to communicate with the old porter who attends her when at the end of the film she lies dying in the empty hotel in the imaginary garrison city. But Bergman does not take the theme beyond the fairly banal range of the "failure of communication" of the soul isolated in pain, and the "silence" of abandonment and death. In *Persona,* the theme of the burden and the failure of language is developed in a much more complex way.

Persona takes the form of a virtual monologue. Besides Alma, there are only two other speaking characters: the psychiatrist and Elizabeth's husband; they appear very briefly. For most of the film we are with the two women, in isolation at the beach – and only one of them, Alma, is talking, talking shyly but incessantly. Since the actress has renounced speech as some sort of contaminating activity, the nurse has moved in to demonstrate the harmlessness and utility of speech. Though the verbalization of the world in which Alma is engaged always has something uncanny about it, it is at the beginning a wholly generous act, conceived for the benefit of her patient. But this soon changes. The actress's silence becomes a provocation, a temptation, a trap. What Bergman unfolds is a situation reminiscent of Strindberg's one-act play *The Stronger,* a duel between two people, one of whom is aggressively silent. And, as in the Strindberg play, the one who talks, who spills her soul, turns out to be weaker than the one who keeps silent. For the quality of that silence alters continually, becoming more and more potent: the mute woman keeps changing. Each of Alma's gestures – of trustful affection, of envy, or hostility – is voided by Elizabeth's relentless silence.

Alma is also betrayed by speech itself. Language is presented as an instrument of fraud and cruelty (the glaring sounds of the newscast; Elizabeth's painful letter to the psychiatrist, which Alma reads); as an instrument of unmasking (the psychiatrist's explanation of why Elizabeth has "chosen" silence; Alma's excoriating portrait of the secrets of Elizabeth's motherhood); as an instrument of self-revelation (Alma's confessional narrative of the impromptu beach orgy); and as art and artifice (the lines of Electra Elizabeth is delivering on stage when she suddenly goes silent; the radio drama Alma switches on in Elizabeth's hospital room that makes the actress smile). *Persona* demonstrates the lack of an appropriate language, a language that is genuinely full. All that remains is a language of lacunae, appropriate to a narrative strung along a set of gaps in the "explanation." In *Persona* these absences of utterance become more potent than words; the person who places uncritical faith in words is brought down from relative composure and self-confidence to hysterical anguish.

Here, indeed, is the most powerful instance of the motif of

exchange. The actress creates a void by her silence. The nurse, by speaking, falls into it – depleting herself. Sickened at the vertigo opened up by the absence of language, Alma at one point begs Elizabeth just to repeat nonsense words and phrases that she hurls at her. But during all the time at the shore, despite every kind of tact, cajoling, and finally frantic pleading by Alma, Elizabeth refuses (obstinately? cruelly? helplessly?) to speak. She has only two lapses. Once when Alma, in a fury, threatens her with a pot of scalding water, the terrified Elizabeth backs against the wall and screams, "No, don't hurt me!" For the moment Alma is triumphant; having made her point, she puts down the pot. But Elizabeth becomes entirely silent again, until late in the film – here, the time sequence is indeterminate – in a brief sequence in the bare hospital room, which shows Alma bending over Elizabeth's bed, begging the actress to say one word. Impassively, Elizabeth complies. The word is "Nothing."

Bergman's treatment of the theme of language in *Persona* also suggests a comparison with films of Godard, particularly *Deux ou Trois Choses* (the café scene). Another example is the recent short film, *Anticipation,* a story of anti-utopia, set in a future world extrapolated from our own which is ruled by the system of "spécialisation intégrale"; in this world there are two kinds of prostitutes, one representing physical love ("gestes sans paroles") and the other representing sentimental love ("paroles sans gestes"). Compared with Bergman's narrative context, the mode of science-fiction fantasy in which Godard has cast his theme permits him both a greater abstraction and the possibility of a resolution of the problem (the divorce between language and love, mind and body) posed so abstractly, so "aesthetically," in the film. At the end of *Anticipation,* the talking prostitute learns to make love and the interplanetary traveler's broken speech is mended; and the fourfold bleached-out color streams merge into full color. The mode of *Persona* is more complex, and far less abstract. There is no happy ending. At the close of the film, mask and person, speech and silence, actor and "soul" remain divided – however parasitically, even vampiristically, they are shown to be intertwined.

NOTES

1. For example, Richard Corliss in the Summer 1967 *Film Quarterly:* "Slowly Alma comes to understand that she is just another of Elizabeth's 'props.'" True, in the sense that Alma, after reading a letter Elizabeth writes to the psychiatrist, does entertain this bitter idea of what Elizabeth is up to. Not true, though, in the sense that the viewer lacks the evidence for coming to any definite conclusions about what's really going on. Yet this is precisely what Corliss does assume, so that he can then go on to make a statement about Elizabeth which isn't backed up by anything said or shown in the film. "The actress had borne a child to help her 'live the part' of a mother, but was disgusted by the boy's determination to stay alive after the role was completed. Now she wants to toss Alma away like the old prompt book."
   The same point about Elizabeth as an exemplar of the parasitical, unscrupulous energies of the artist is made by Vernon Young in his unfavorable notice of the film in the Summer 1967 *Hudson Review.* Both Corliss and Young point out that Elizabeth shares the same last name, *Vogler,* with the magician-artist in *The Magician.*
2. Which is what most critics have done with this scene: assume that it's a real event and insert it into the "action" of the film. Richard Corliss disposes of the matter, without a touch of uncertainty, thus: "When Elizabeth's blind husband visits, he mistakes Alma for his wife [and] they make love." But the only evidence for the husband being blind is that the man we see wears dark glasses – plus the critic's wish to find a "realistic" explanation for such implausible goings-on.

CHRISTOPHER ORR

4 Scenes from the Class Struggle in Sweden

PERSONA AS BRECHTIAN MELODRAMA

To call *Persona* an Ingmar Bergman film seems an unproblematic statement of fact, yet this apparently innocent designation contains two crucial implications. The first is that we should see the film as an expression of Bergman's aesthetic and intellectual development. The second is that we are expected to ground our understanding in the author's intentions. Bergman, who wrote the film script while hospitalized in 1965, would later claim that making *Persona* saved his life or, more precisely, his life as an artist.[1] For this reason, the dilemma of the actress Elisabet Vogler is typically seen as a projection of the director's own artistic crisis.

Much of what has been written about *Persona* follows this auteurist approach in which the film is regarded as a rewriting of *8½* by the Fellini of the North.[2] The intention of this essay, however, is to examine Bergman's film through the concept of genre. Like most art films, *Persona* seems to defy the generic categories that comprise mainstream cinema. The art cinema, however, resembles a generic category itself by displaying certain recurrent characteristics and eliciting specific viewing practices. Two dominant traits of the art film are authorial expressivity and ambiguity.[3] The initial responses to *Persona*'s ambiguity reflected a 1960s film culture dominated by auteurism and new criticism and amounted to an unresolved critical debate over what the film's author was actually expressing. Meaning, we now more clearly understand, does not reside exclusively within the film text but

instead involves an interaction between the film and its spectator. The more ambiguous the text in question, the more it is open to interpretations that go beyond whatever the author's original intention might have been or even what the text explicitly says.

In spite of the notion that the art cinema is somehow beyond genre, individual art films often do belong to the same generic categories one finds in mainstream cinema. Because of the emphasis on the vision of the individual artist, however, critical responses to *Persona* and other art films tend to overlook the role that genre plays in the creation of meaning. Most of Bergman's films, including *Persona,* are melodramas. *Persona* exhibits many of the traits associated with this genre: the disruption of the domestic sphere, the frustration of desire by social convention, and the expression of personal conflict through intense displays of emotion. The audience's recognition of this generic formula, which initiates a set of expectations based on how similar conflicts are resolved in other melodramas, influences the film's meaning.

Since the 1970s a great deal of film criticism has been devoted to examining the classical Hollywood melodrama as a reflection of cultural anxieties over gender roles and class distinctions. *Persona* has to a large extent been exempt from this critical approach. Susan Sontag and Robin Wood, for example, insist that Bergman lacks a political consciousness. On the face of it, this claim seems reasonable. Bergman is, after all, a native of a country that has remained politically neutral throughout the twentieth century. Moreover, Sweden is technically a socialist state, a fact that likely encourages *Persona*'s critics to ignore the film's treatment of class issues. Yet while economic inequality in Sweden may not be as extreme as one finds in other developed nations such as the United States, Bergman's country does possess a comparable class structure. (Yugoslav filmmaker Dusan Makavejev's *Montenegro* [1981] offers a satiric and devastating critique of Sweden's class system.) In other words, *Persona* does address social issues that are similar to what one finds in the American melodrama, and it is possible to read Bergman's film politically. Although Elisabet Vogler personifies the dilemma of the modern artist, she is also a

member of Sweden's cultural elite; thus her class status is quite different from that of the nurse who cares for her. The interaction between Elisabet and Alma, while certainly raising the issue of the fragile nature of personal identity, can also be understood as an expression of class envy and exploitation.

Furthermore, *Persona* remains the most avant-garde of Bergman's films in the sense that its self-reflexive devices disrupt the spectator's involvement in the events of the narrative and call attention to the film's status as material object. In this respect, *Persona* can be placed within the context of what was in 1967 an emerging subgenre of the art cinema: the Brechtian film. Starting from Brecht's theory and practice, proponents of Brechtian cinema called for films that would reject the Aristotelian catharsis of emotions in favor of interrupting the spectator's identification with the film's narrative through the alienation effect, thereby allowing the spectator to reflect critically on the ideological issues being presented. Critics disagree, however, over whether the self-reflexive devices in *Persona* are genuinely Brechtian because the film lacks the kind of explicit political content one finds in the films of a Jean-Luc Godard or a Jean-Marie Straub.

My argument is that *Persona* is a subversive melodrama because it implicitly questions dominant Western attitudes toward gender and class and that its self-reflexivity provides the spectator with the opportunity for Brechtian reflection on these issues. This essay thus provides an alternative to the dominant auteurist view of *Persona* that approaches the film as a work of individual genius exploring the human condition in universal terms. The point of seeing Bergman's film as a continuation of the tradition of the melodrama and as a response to the Brechtian cinema movement is to emphasize the importance of *Persona* as a product of 1960s film culture and thus as a reflection of its historical moment.

PERSONA AS MELODRAMA

Bergman films have sometimes been criticized for their intense and arguably excessive displays of emotion. In order to

define the expectations the spectator brings to such moments, one needs to move from the adjective *melodramatic* commonly used to describe emotional scenes to the noun *melodrama.* According to Stephen Neale, the disequilibrium that inaugurates the narrative movement in melodrama is "specified as the process of desire and of the various blockages to its fulfillment within an apparently 'common sense,' established social order."[4] What distinguishes the melodrama from other noncomic genres in which desire plays a role such as the detective film, the thriller, or even the western is that when physical/criminal violence occurs in melodrama, its function is secondary or marginal. Violence itself does not initiate narrative disequilibrium. Thus melodrama is not about a crisis of the social order, "but a crisis within it."[5] Its suspense is generated by the conflict it represents between desire and social conventions, or what Neale labels "discourses about class, sexuality, property and the family."[6]

Melodrama reflects and speaks to crises within the social order, anxieties created by a perceived gap between individual needs and the structure of society. Most melodramas ultimately contain these anxieties, thereby resolving their conflicts without threatening the status quo. During an encounter between Alma and Elisabet early in *Persona,* Alma implies that for her the purpose of art is therapeutic – a position that some of the film's critics cite as evidence of her shallowness. Yet Alma's view of art is quite perceptive as an assessment of melodrama, which generally is therapeutic because its goal is to facilitate our adjustment to social reality.

Yet not all melodramas fulfill this expectation. A number of American melodramas primarily from the 1950s, especially those directed by Douglas Sirk, have been labeled subversive because they allegedly undermine the dominant ideology of their time. For example, the ideological project of Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1956) is to articulate and dissipate its middle-class audience's resentment toward the rich. In pursuit of this goal, the film creates an opposition between two affluent characters, Kyle Hadley and his sister Marylee, heirs to the family oil fortune, and two characters, Mitch Wayne and Lucy Moore, who function as objects of audience iden-

tification. Kyle marries Lucy and his sister pursues Mitch, who in turn discovers he is in love with Kyle's wife. These class misalliances are resolved through Kyle's suicide, which allows the middle-class hero and heroine to leave together after turning their backs on the Hadley fortune. The film's message seems to be that one should not envy the rich because they are unhappy, incapable of love, and prone to alcoholism. Yet the film's "happy" ending, although emotionally satisfying, is also unconvincing and arbitrary. The message of Sirk's melodrama is subverted by the drabness and powerlessness of the bourgeois couple.[7]

The narrative disequilibrium of *Persona* is, of course, inaugurated by the mental breakdown of Elisabet Vogler. Her condition is symptomatic of what Neale defines as a blockage of desire. In the version of the psychiatrist's speech analyzing Elizabet's condition from the screenplay Bergman wrote in 1965, Mrs. Vogler's breakdown is diagnosed not as a response to her acting roles but rather to her "real-life roles" of wife, friend, "mother and mistress."[8] The actress's cure, the object of her prolonged sojourn with Alma at the psychiatrist's summer house, must therefore involve unblocking her desires in order to facilitate her readjustment to social reality.

Alma, the young and relatively inexperienced nurse who has been assigned to care for Mrs. Vogler, is initially frightened by the strength shown by the actress's refusal to speak. As Alma prepares for bed that evening after meeting Elisabet, she reassures herself that her life is safe and she has nothing to worry about. She has a job she likes, and she will marry her fiancé, Karl-Henrik, and have his children. She has submitted to her conditioning and adjusted to her position within society.

Yet Alma's contact with Elisabet while the two of them live together ultimately undermines her expectations and sense of safety. Her character changes far more perceptibly than does that of her patient during this sojourn. Moreover, the interaction between the nurse and the actress is first and foremost a relationship, and in this respect *Scenes from a Marriage* would be appropriate as an alternative title for this film.[9]

The high point of this relationship occurs during a rainy evening that begins with Alma narrating a story about her past (which Elisabet later describes in her letter as "some sort of episodic orgy with a completely strange boy and abortion afterwards") and ends with the scene in which the actress comes into the nurse's bedroom where we have the memorable shot of the two women facing the camera while Elisabet brushes back the hair from Alma's forehead. Between these two events there is a brief but crucial speech in which the nurse, who had seen one of the actress's films, asserts that the two of them look alike and that she could change herself into Elisabet if she tried hard.

Although Alma's discourse speaks to the theme of merging, it also addresses what Paisley Livingston describes as the celebrity/fan dichotomy: "In Vogler the nurse faces a celebrity, a 'star' who has always moved beyond, or more exactly, above, her own lim-

ited experience. A radical difference in social status thus accentuates the differences of age, experience, and personal fortitude."[10] The nurse's adoration of her patient is based on social envy – an envy contained or dissipated by identification with the celebrity. Alma imagines herself transformed into the enviable and hence glamorous object of desire. Her attraction to the actress thus becomes a form of self-love. In loving Elisabet, Alma loves herself not as she is, but how she imagines she could be.

Paradoxically, this process through which the fan identifies with the film actress depends on the separation of these entities. The star who acts before the camera is absent at the moment in which her filmed image is consumed. Alma's belief that she could transform herself into Elisabet is inspired by seeing the actress in a film and then looking at herself in the mirror.

The crucial difference between the celebrity/audience phenomenon and the situation in *Persona* is that Elisabet is literally present to Alma. While the actress is on the screen, her image enables a spectator such as Alma to escape temporarily from the realities of her existence. Because Elisabet coexists with Alma within the world of the film, however, the process whereby the celebrity functions as an imaginary diversion for her audience is destabilized. Elisabet's physical presence leads Alma to believe that the glamour represented by the actress is something she can attain not merely within the realm of the daydream but in real life.

Conversely, much of Elisabet's behavior can be explained by her need to maintain her distance from Alma. There are two reasons for this. As an actress, she has a professional interest in observing the nurse for future roles. As a film star, her image presents what John Ellis calls an impossible paradox: "The star is ordinary, and hence leads a life like other people, . . . [she] is present in the same social universe as the potential film viewer. At the same time the star is extraordinary, removed from the life of mere mortals, . . . separate from the world of the potential film viewer."[11] As an ordinary person, Elisabet desires the attention and adoration of her companion. Yet her image of herself as extraordinary requires her to remain separate.

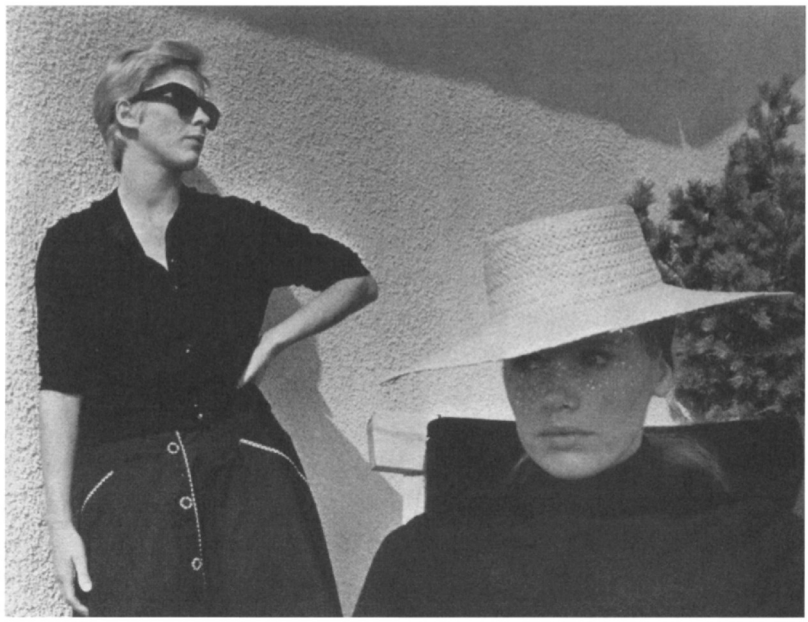
The rainy evening sequence illustrates how the actress's need for Alma's love poses a potential threat to her position of superiority. After the story of the beach orgy, we hear Elisabet (offscreen) apparently whisper to Alma that she must go to bed or she will fall asleep at the table. The following day Elisabet denies that she spoke and also denies that she came into Alma's room later that night. Many of *Persona*'s critics accept Elisabet's denials and interpret the speech and night visit as an hallucinatory expression of Alma's unrequited love. Alternatively, one could argue that these events actually happened. Elisabet found herself attracted to Alma during that rainy evening and then thought better of it the next day. Following this interpretative line, the fact that she forgot to seal the letter to her psychiatrist – a classic Freudian slip – reflects her unconscious need to maintain her superior status within the relationship. In the letter she describes Alma as "a little bit in love [with her] in a charming way" and then dismisses her nurse with the observation that "it's fun studying her."

The second half of *Persona,* initiated by the simulated breakdown of the film projector, is centered around Alma's mental crisis more than Elisabet's. Our concern shifts primarily to the blockages to the fulfillment of the nurse's desire. For example, shortly after the beginning of the second part, Alma begs Elisabet to talk to her. When the actress does not respond, Alma complains that Elisabet does not need her anymore while at the same time acknowledging that her own rhetoric sounds false or melodramatic. When this protest fails, Alma brings up the matter of the unsealed letter and grabs her patient, who then slaps Alma in the face, causing her nose to bleed. Alma retaliates by picking up a pan of boiling water, which forces Elisabet to cry out in protest. The nurse's triumph in getting her patient to respond, however, is short-lived. The actress simply laughs at her, inspiring Alma, like the psychiatrist at the beginning of the film, to analyze the purpose of Elisabet's refusal to speak. She begins by repeating the psychiatrist's thesis that the actress's silence reflects her quest for authenticity and then argues quite plausibly that this ideal is simply a rationalization for Elisabet's selfishness. The actress angrily walks away, and Alma in turn

follows her, begging forgiveness. When the nurse finally realizes that Elisabet will not relent, she falls down on the stony beach and bursts into tears.

This sequence is probably the most melodramatic in the entire film. In addition to its display of excessive emotion, we also witness a domestic relationship that has reached a dysfunctional state. Alma clearly appears to be on the verge of a nervous collapse. Her aspirations to be like the famous actress have been cruelly shattered along with her identity as a nurse. She humiliates herself by running after Elisabet to beg her forgiveness because of the guilt she feels about not doing her job. Alma behaves exactly like the heroine of the banal radio melodrama the two women had listened to in one of the early hospital scenes. Elisabet, however, seems content to use her silence to intensify Alma's sense of desperation.

The issue of the actress's refusal to speak remains problematic.



"A domestic relationship that has reached a dysfunctional state"

It is admirable to the extent that it reflects a desire to live an authentic life free of pretending and lies. Yet as we have just seen, Elisabet uses her silence to maintain her distance from her nurse and in the process causes Alma considerable mental anguish. Although the nurse's perception of Elisabet's refusal to speak as willful and unadulterated egotism ("rottenness" in her words) may be a bit overstated, Alma's position is to some extent validated by the pivotal section of *Persona* dealing with the visit of Elisabet's husband.

After showing Elisabet contemplating with fascinated horror a photograph of a Warsaw ghetto child as she had earlier stared at the Vietnam footage, Bergman cuts to the nurse's room where Alma suddenly wakes up. She hears a voice from outside the house calling out the name "Elisabet." The nurse then goes into her patient's room, where she comments on how flabby the

actress's face looks as she sleeps. This remark can be seen as the typical response of a jilted lover. Yet at the same time it implies that Alma is assessing realistically an image that she had once perceived as glamorous. The fan has now become a critical spectator, and the star is both absent (asleep) and present.

The nurse's reverie is interrupted by Mr. Vogler's cries, and Alma goes out to meet him, followed by Elisabet. The husband, whose dark glasses suggest he may be blind, mistakes Alma for his wife and complains that he can hardly bear the great tenderness he feels for her. In terms of domestic melodrama, Mr. Vogler is demanding his "marital rights." Elisabet at this point takes the nurse's hand and places it on her husband's face, prodding Alma into fulfilling an obligation that the actress finds distasteful. After the two apparently have sex, Alma pushes the husband away while describing herself as "cold and rotten and bored."

Although Mr. Vogler's visit is a crucial event in the film, the episode itself is wholly improbable. If the husband is blind, how could he have found his way from Stockholm to this isolated summer house without assistance? More significantly, how could he mistake Alma's voice and body for that of his wife? What makes the status of this scene even more problematic is the absence of codes such as soft focus and abstract sound that have marked the film's other nonrealistic moments. On balance, this episode seems likely a product of the nurse's tortured imagination, something she has dreamed. At the same time, Elisabet's behavior in Alma's dream is consistent with what we have learned about her in the film's ostensibly realistic segments. Moreover, Alma's representation of the husband accurately reflects what she knows about him from reading his letter aloud to Elisabet in her hospital room. Although this event is probably imaginary, it remains no less important than those events we perceive as actually happening. Here Alma has experienced what it is like to be Elisabet and to learn from that experience. The moment when the nurse pushes away Mr. Vogler and cries out that she is "cold and rotten and bored" demonstrates how she has internalized her patient's per-

sonal life as fully as possible and, as a result, realizes her privileged position is neither glamorous nor desirable. *Persona* thus recalls Sirk's critique in *Written on the Wind* of the unsatisfying lives of his affluent characters.

Mr. Vogler's visit also illustrates how Elisabet's mental breakdown, her refusal to speak, is a response to her dissatisfaction with her personal life. It further demonstrates how she uses her silence to exploit those around her. In Alma's dream, Elisabet manipulates her nurse into taking over an unpleasant aspect of her life just as she has turned over the care of her child to others. There is thus a certain irony to the actress's sensitive response to the plight of the Jewish boy in the Warsaw ghetto photograph. It would seem that Elisabet can only feel empathy for situations that occur outside the world of her immediate experience.

The photograph of another child, Elisabet's 4-year-old son, initiates the next scene, the film's emotional climax, which opens with a close shot of the actress's hands. Alma pushes the hands aside to reveal the child's photograph that Elisabet had torn in half in an earlier scene. The nurse asks her patient to talk about the child. When she refuses, Alma then narrates the story of Elisabet's motherhood. The gist of Alma's monologue is that the actress chose to become pregnant because someone at a party had mentioned that her life was incomplete because she lacked motherliness. Once Mrs. Vogler realized she had made a mistake, it was too late. Her dilemma is that she finds her child repulsive yet feels guilty because she cannot return his love and thus fulfill the persona of motherhood.

When Alma begins her monologue, Elisabet is framed in a medium shot from over the nurse's shoulder. Bergman then cuts to a medium close shot of the actress, followed by a close-up. The scene is then repeated verbatim from the opposite point of view. However, as the nurse completes her lengthy monologue for the second time, there is a split-screen effect lasting one to two seconds in which one-half of Alma's face is matched to the other half of Elisabet's. (Bergman prepares us for this trick shot by lighting

Elisabet's and Alma's faces so that half of their faces are in shadow.) As if responding to this effect, Alma insists that she is not Elisabet Vogler.

Through the split-screen image, Bergman asserts at some level that these two women are the same. This assertion, however, does not apply at the level of class difference because the film has clearly established the identity of these two characters as social types. By the end of the husband's visit, the nurse had apparently worked through her infatuation for and identification with her patient. As she begins her monologue, she is in charge of the situation. Alma uses her language to place Elisabet on the defensive, just as the actress had earlier used her silence to threaten the nurse's emotional stability. Ostensibly, the purpose of Alma's discourse is to help her patient come to terms with the trauma of motherhood. Yet this discourse is highly aggressive and becomes in effect an assault on both Elisabet and her social class. Alma's message, reminiscent of 1950s melodrama, is that people of the actress's class have lost the capacity to feel and consequently cannot handle competently such socially sanctioned activities as motherhood.

The last real interaction between the two women occurs when Alma, now wearing her nurse's uniform, goes into Elisabet's room, wakes her, and then asks her to repeat the word *ingenting* ("nothing"). When the actress does speak the word on screen, the nurse responds by saying that this is how it must be. In the film's concluding sequence, we see the two women closing up the summer house and packing their belongings. As Alma walks out alone with her suitcase, there is a cut to Elisabet performing in *Electra,* followed by a shot of the director and his cameraman on a crane. We then watch the nurse get on a bus that will presumably take her back to Stockholm.

The shot of Elisabet acting may suggest that she has recovered to the point where she can go back to work. The 1965 screenplay contains an explicit statement to the effect that she has returned to her profession and family. If this is the case, then *Persona* fol-

lows the typical melodramatic formula that begins with the disruption of the domestic sphere and concludes with its reconstitution, thereby resolving a crisis within the social order. The Elisabet/Alma relationship ends because it has accomplished its purpose; the actress is apparently reconciled to her position within the social order. Yet given what we have learned about Mrs. Vogler and her family, it is hard to imagine her adjusting successfully to her domestic situation. Had Bergman chosen to follow exactly his 1965 screenplay, *Persona* would have presented its audience with the kind of arbitrary or unconvincing closure one finds in the subversive melodramas of the 1950s. Instead, Bergman leaves open the question of Elisabet's fate. The shot of the actress performing in *Electra* that we see at the film's conclusion was used at the beginning of the film as part of the explanation of Elisabet's mental breakdown. Bergman's ending is thus considerably more ambiguous than what he had written originally. This change, however, does not constitute a break with the subversive melodrama but rather a further development of that tradition.

Alma's fate, like that of Elisabet, is also left open or unresolved. The nurse we encounter at the beginning of *Persona* seems a rather ordinary person who avoids reflecting on her social conditioning and looks forward to a safe and stable future within her social sphere with her job, future husband, and children. The contact with Elisabet, as Wood points out, "at once rescues her from this fate and condemns her to the desperation and torment which, at the end of the film, she may or may not be able to transcend."[12] Although Alma remains in a state of torment because of her encounter with the actress, this experience has been a kind of political education for the young nurse. She has abandoned the naive, comforting, class-bound attitudes she held when she first met Elisabet. Although she has been denied access to what she once perceived as the glamorous world of the cultural elite, she has come to recognize the limitations of that class. In this respect her decision to have Elisabet repeat the word *ingenting* is signifi-

cant. Within the context of the scene, the word functions as an assessment of the state of the relationship between the two women. Yet within the world of Bergman and his surrogate, Elisabet Vogler, *ingenting* connotes the existential angst members of the cultural elite feel in confronting a universe they perceive as meaningless and absurd. Alma's knowledge of this class has reached a point where she is able to appropriate its language. Significantly, Alma in this scene as well as the film's concluding sequence no longer dresses as Elisabet does but wears her nurse's uniform. In making this clothing choice, Alma attempts to reassert a professional distance over a relationship that had become all too personal. Disillusioned by the actress's world, she has chosen to identify with her own social class.

PERSONA AND BRECHTIAN CINEMA

Because of its self-reflexive devices, *Persona* resembles what was in 1967 an emerging subgenre of the art cinema – the Brechtian film. Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* appeared during the year that Bergman wrote the *Persona* screenplay, and *Weekend* was also released in 1967. Yet Susan Sontag and Robin Wood insist that the self-reflexivity of *Persona* is not Brechtian. Sontag argues that "Bergman's intention, in the beginning and end of *Persona* and in this terrifying caesura in the middle, is quite different from – indeed, it is the romantic opposite of – Brecht's intention of alienating the audience by supplying continual reminders that what they are watching is theatre. . . . Rather, he is making a statement about the complexity of what can be represented."[13] Wood claims that Bergman's self-reflexivity has nothing in common with the "play of distanciation with which Godard preserves the spectator's analytical detachment. Bergman, on the contrary, draws the spectator into the film, demanding total emotional involvement."[14] Conversely, Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, editors of the influential film journal *Cahiers du cinéma,* imply that *Persona* contains Brechtian elements. *Persona* belongs to a category

of film whose "content is not explicitly political, but in some way becomes so through criticism practiced on it through its form."[15]

There is some truth to Wood's argument that the self-reflexivity one finds in *Persona* is not the same as that of Godard. Bergman does not possess the French director's didactic political consciousness. When we encounter disruptive or self-reflexive moments in *Pierrot le Fou* or *Weekend,* our efforts to comprehend Godard's formal concerns involve us in political reflection. Nevertheless, the editors of *Cahiers* are correct to suggest that even though Bergman is not following a precise political agenda, his film is "progressive" and arguably Brechtian because its form breaks down traditional or ideological ways of depicting reality so that its content takes on a political dimension.

Initially, the term *Brechtian cinema* was applied to a body of politically informed self-reflexive films produced during the 1960s and early 1970s.[16] One characteristic of the development of this movement was an increasing emphasis on alienating the spectator from an involvement with narrative, as in such films as Straub/Huillet's *History Lessons* (1972) and much of Godard's work after May 1968 (e.g., *Tout va bien* [1972]).[17] Brecht affirmed that the kind of dramatic work he advocated was not interested in the "investment of the spectator's emotions,"[18] but he nevertheless insisted that some degree of spectator identification was necessary in order for the work to achieve its political goals. In his "Notes to the *Threepenny Opera,*" Brecht states that the play is "concerned with bourgeois conceptions not only as content, by representing them, but also through the manner it which it does so. It is a kind of report on life as any member of the audience would like to see it. Since at the same time, however, he sees a good deal that he has no wish to see; since therefore he sees his wishes not merely fulfilled but also criticized . . ."[19]

As a melodrama centered around the plight of a disturbed actress, *Persona* clearly represents a bourgeois content to a bourgeois art cinema audience, thus fulfilling the wishes of that audience. Yet because *Persona* is also a subversive melodrama, repre-

senting class roles fraught with contradictions, it follows that the use of disruptive self-reflexive devices would encourage the spectator to reflect critically on these contradictions. Such devices as the film burning in the middle or the twice-told monologue function as an alienation effect that allows us "to recognize [the] subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar."[20]

Although it is possible to define *Persona* as a Brechtian film, this assertion does not refute completely the claim made by Sontag and Wood that Bergman's self-reflexivity is the opposite of what one finds in Godard. The distinction between the avant-garde devices in *Persona* and *Pierrot le Fou* is that Bergman's self-reflexivity is open to both political and expressive readings. The reasons for this distinction go beyond personal differences: Sweden provided Bergman with a very different creative context than Paris offered Godard during the 1960s. Nevertheless, the reverberations from France and elsewhere can be felt in Bergman's radical departure from the formal elegance and theatricality of his earlier films. Nowhere is this experimentation more obvious than in *Persona*'s opening.

The film's precredit sequence begins with shots of arc lamps, film leader, and a projector, followed by a rapid series of disjointed images, some of which allude to earlier Bergman films. Several shots of bodies in a morgue introduce the scene in which a boy of about 11 (Jorgen Lindstrom, the child protagonist of *The Silence* [1963]) gets up from a hospital bed and moves a hand in front of the camera. Bergman then changes to a camera position from over the boy's shoulder from which we are shown alternating close shots of Liv Ullmann and Bibi Andersson shifting in and out of focus as the boy touches the screen in front of him. This sequence obviously calls attention to the motion picture apparatus while moving spectators to decipher the director's cryptic meaning. However, because the spectator has not as yet had the chance to become involved in the film's narrative, the precredit sequence does not truly provide an opportunity for Brechtian reflection.

The case of the depicted projector breakdown in the middle of *Persona,* however, provides a more suitable example of the alien-

Projector/persona "breakdown"

ation effect. This interruption begins with the filmed image of Alma tearing and then burning, followed by blank screen. Next we see three shots from a slapstick comedy sketch of a devil figure chasing two men about a room, followed by more blank screen and then the close-up of a nail being pounded into a hand. (Both shots had been used in the film's prologue.) Bergman then cuts to an extreme close-up of an eye, where the camera tracks left from the iris to the whites. Next we see a shot of curtains and then observe an out-of-focus human figure (Elisabet) pull aside the curtains and walk into a room. The figure suddenly comes into focus, signaling the continuation of the diegetic narrative.

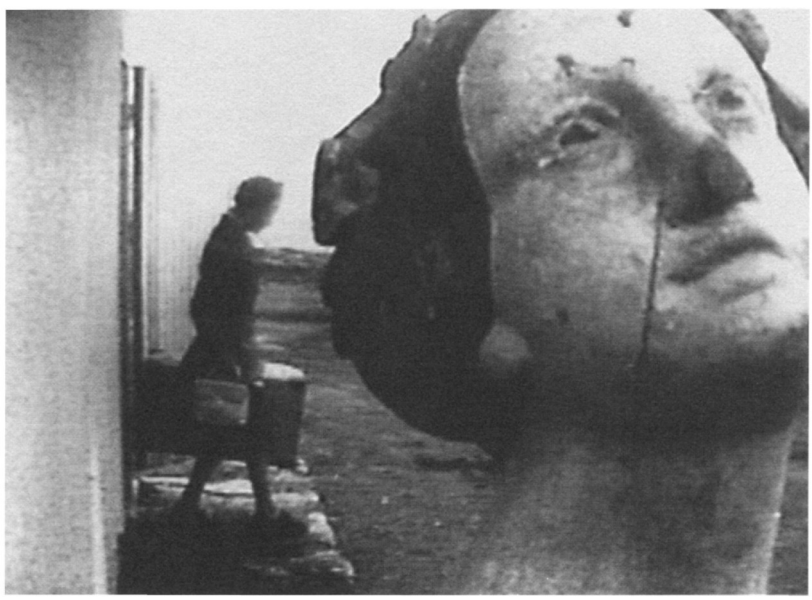
John Simon explains this sequence by arguing that the "film has ripped and burned from the weight and heat of emotion it was unable to bear."[21] Although this may be a plausible observation, its purpose is to contain the defamiliarizing effects of this sequence. In the preceding scene, Alma had deliberately left a piece of broken glass on the patio. After going back inside, she

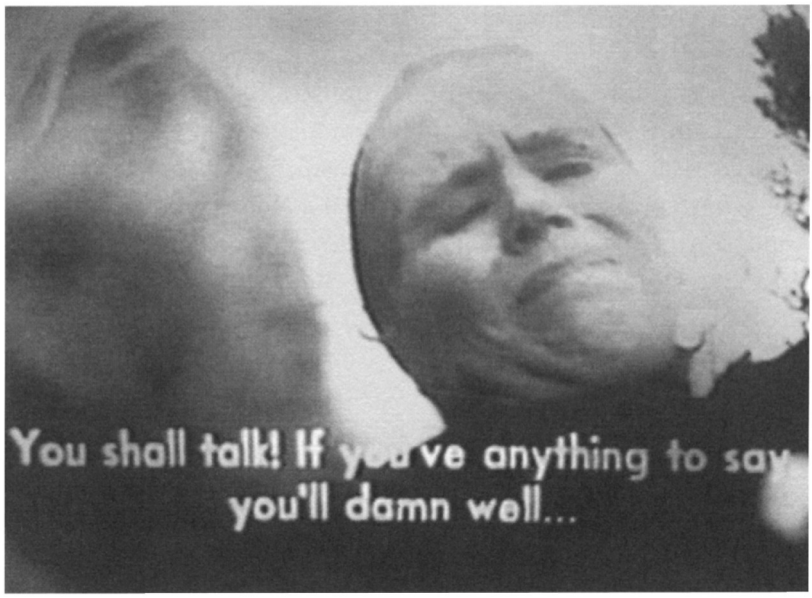
hears Elisabet scream. Alma then walks over to a window and looks toward her patient, who glances accusingly back at her. During this scene, we may identify with Elisabet's pain and indignation and we must certainly identify with Alma's anger and guilt. (Alma, who has been taught to see herself through the eyes of others, cannot help but feel in the wrong when confronted with Elisabet's stare.) The break in the narrative provides us with the opportunity to reflect on the vicarious emotions we have just experienced. We may realize, for example, that what allows the actress to feel outraged is her failure to recognize how she has exploited her companion. It is appropriate in this regard that the out of focus figure turns out to be Elisabet. We may also realize that Alma's guilt is unwarranted. Her action, although childish, was still a justifiable response to the infamous unsealed letter. Her guilt is defamiliarized in the sense that we do not see it as something natural and therefore justified but as a product of a social conditioning that favors Elisabet's class.

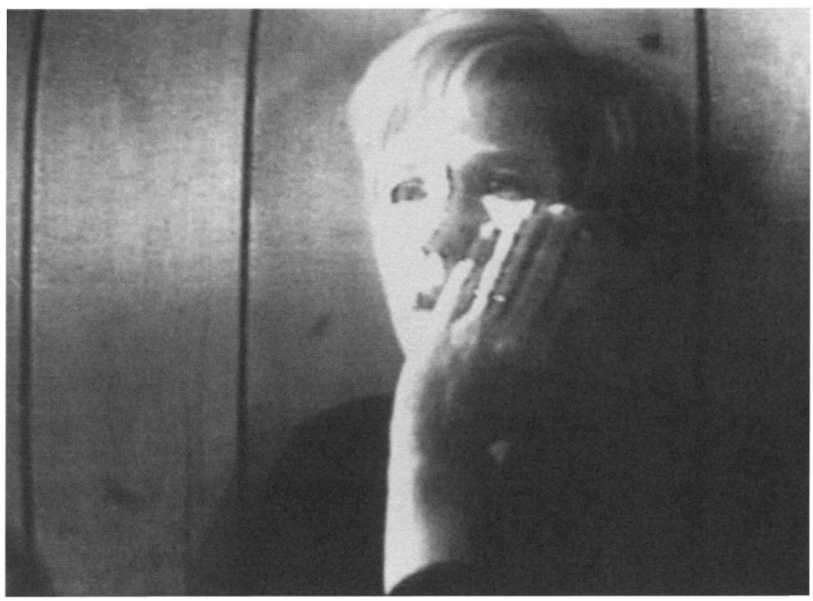
Alma's twice-told monologue on Elisabet's motherhood is perhaps *Persona*'s best example of an avant-garde device that can be read in terms of both authorial expressivity and Brechtian distanciation. Hearing the nurse's speech for the second time, we experience a genuine Brechtian moment, the full awareness of the text as constructed object. The second version of Alma's speech takes the form of an outtake that has been deliberately restored to concentrate attention on the ideological content of the monologue, a task all the more important for an English-speaking audience reading subtitles. The repetition of this monologue allows us to recognize Alma's discourse as an indictment of the coldness of Elisabet's social class from a position outside that class. However, the split-screen image at the end of the scene forces the realization that Bergman has also repeated the monologue to suggest the fusion of two identities. Given the extent to which the film has established Alma and Elisabet as representatives of distinct social types, what then does Bergman mean by combining the two faces? Alma had an abortion at the insistence of her fiancé, a decision she now seems to regret; Elisabet had a child she never wanted in response

to social pressure. The two women are similar because their desires for an authentic life have been frustrated by the social orders they inhabit. This interpretation of the split-screen image of Alma and Elisabet, however, may not be Bergman's consciously intended message. He may have regarded this disturbing composite shot of the actresses' "bad sides" as a universal statement on the human condition in the modern world. Even so, this idealist interpretation does not cancel out Alma's materialist critique of Elisabet's social class. As an alienation effect, the twice-told monologue may not exhibit the Brechtian purity one finds in Godard, but it undoubtedly provokes Brechtian reflection.

Brechtian practice also allows for alienation effects that do not impede narrative flow. In addition to the inexplicable appearance of a large sculpted figurehead of a woman outside the summer house as Alma, suitcase in hand, leaves for the city, there are two striking examples in *Persona*'s second half of distancing the spectator through the manipulation of the film set. During the sequence that follows the simulated projector breakdown, Alma confronts




You shall talk! If you've anything to say
you'll damn well...



Elisabet with the matter of the unsealed letter. This confrontation is photographed in a single take lasting approximately thirty-eight seconds. At the end of the shot, we see Elisabet in profile with her hand poised to strike Alma, who is offscreen. In the background stands a withered pine tree. Bergman then cuts to a shot of a hand striking the nurse's face. However, what we see in the background is the wood-paneled interior of the summer house. This striking violation of classical editing codes underlines the status of the film as a constructed object and startles us out of our involvement with the melodramatic display of emotions we have been witnessing.

A second example of an alienation effect based on the manipulation of setting is the scene in which Alma forces Elisabet to repeat the word *ingenting.* This action, which occurs directly before the women prepare to leave the summer house, apparently takes place in a hospital room, prompting the spectator to understand it as a flashback or flashforward. Neither of these options, however, seems tenable. The familiarity with which Alma treats Elisabet precludes the first option, and the fact that the scene announces the end of the relationship precludes the second. It also seems unlikely that this scene emanates from Alma's imagination as was apparently the case with the husband's visit. Instead, by returning Alma to her workplace and vocational uniform, Bergman reinforces the significance of the class struggle the two women have enacted.

Although the hyperaffectivity of melodrama seems at odds with the dispassionate reflection Brecht advocated, the moments of intense emotion in *Persona,* like those in other subversive melodramas, are a response to ideological contradictions, sites of excess that implicitly defamiliarize a social order perceived as natural. In *Persona,* Bergman had wedded his characteristic emotional intensity to Brechtian alienation effects as a way of emphasizing the subversive message of his melodrama. In other words, because the director calls attention to the construction of the text during these moments, he provides us with the opportunity to reflect on and thus more fully understand the social causes behind the film's intense affectivity. Bergman has stated that "our whole social system is based to an enormous extent on humiliation" and that it is

"terribly important that art expose humiliation."[22] Within the film culture of the 1960s, the director's use of the Brechtian melodrama form became a highly effective means of achieving this goal.

NOTES

1. Ingmar Bergman, *Images: My Life in Film,* translated by Marianne Ruuth (New York: Arcade, 1994), 64.
2. See, for example, Robin Wood, *Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Praeger, 1969); John Simon, *Ingmar Bergman Directs* (New York: Harcourt, 1972); and Birgitta Steene, *Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Twayne, 1968).
3. See David Bordwell's "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" (*Film Criticism* 4.1 [1979]: 56–63) for a discussion of the distinctions between the art and mainstream cinemas.
4. Stephen Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 22.
5. Neale, 22.
6. Neale, 29.
7. See my essay "Closure and Containment: Marylee Hadley in *Written on the Wind,*" in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama,* edited by Marcia Landry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 380–387.
8. Ingmar Bergman, *Persona and Shame: The Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman,* translated by Keith Bradfield (New York: Gross, 1972), 41.
9. Robin Wood in *"Persona* Revisited" (*Cineaction* 34 [1994]: 59–67) calls attention to seeing the interaction between Elisabet and Alma as a relationship by focusing on the film's lesbian subtext. Wood commends Bergman's dramatization of female bonding in *Persona*'s first half and then attributes the disintegration of this bond to Bergman's failure to imagine "the possibility of a new 'home' of [female] solidarity and mutual supportiveness" (63). Wood, however, chooses to ignore the extent to which class differences contribute to the failure of this relationship.
10. Paisley Livingston, *Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 202.
11. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema: Television: Video* (London: Routledge, 1982), 97.
12. Wood, "Revisited," 63.
13. Sontag, 140.
14. Wood, *Ingmar Bergman,* 145.
15. Jean Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism (1)," *Screen Reader 1* (London: Society for Education in Film and Television, 1977), 6.
16. At the present time there seem to be no more than a handful of

filmmakers such as Peter Greenaway and Dusan Makavejev who carry on the Brechtian tradition.

17. In "The Politics of Separation" (*Screen* 16.4 [1975–76]: 46–57), Colin MacCabe argues that *History Lessons* and *Tout va bien* do not have a sufficient "bribe of identity" from which the spectator can be distanced. Instead of Brechtian distanciation, the audience experiences boredom.
18. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre,* translated by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 45.
19. Brecht, 43.
20. Brecht, 192.
21. Simon, 292.
22. Quoted in Simon, 306.

STEVE VINEBERG

5 *Persona* and the Seduction of Performance

The opening images of *Persona* prepare us for the exploratory, inchoate nature of the film. In the flickering half light of a projector, we see film leader catch onto the groove of a reel, and the first part of the montage that ensues – clips from a cartoon, a silent comedy, a nature film, and so on – suggests a child's introduction to the varieties of moviemaking. Eventually we see that child, emerging from the sleep where perhaps he dreamed those images. He reaches out his hand and touches a blurry projection that crystallizes, magically, into Liv Ullmann's face. It has been often assumed that the child is Ingmar Bergman, and that the frame around the narrative of *Persona* – which concludes as the film winding around that reel abruptly runs out – addresses his own godlike role as a film director: when the child touches the projected light in wonder, he mimics Michelangelo's God extending life to Adam.[1] And Bergman's self-consciousness about creating film is sustained throughout *Persona,* even though the film-within-a-film imagery passes quickly out of the movie, recurring only briefly and much later on. For the rest of the picture, Bergman addresses this issue through the related theme of performance, which his collaboration with his two stars, Ullmann (who plays an actress, Elisabet Vogler) and Bibi Andersson, brings into focus.

Bergman fell in love with the theater at the age of 9 and built a toy stage to express that love; he began as an actor and director in

the Swedish theater and returned to it many times during his career before allowing it to eclipse his film work completely in the early 1980s. For him the line between live theater and movies is an indistinct and finally an unimportant one. The theater is a setting he often visits in his movies; his characters are frequently actors and dancers, occasionally circus artists. In the rare but immensely satisfying moments when he shoots theatrical performances – in *Summer Interlude* and *Smiles of a Summer Night,* and of course throughout *The Magic Flute* – the stage-to-screen transcription has a purity, a fluidity, that belies the separation of the two forms. Bergman's preoccupation with performance is a constant in his movies, and it both explains and extends his interest in acting – an interest that is clear in the remarkable quality of the acting in so many of his films, and in the ensemble ideal he always reaches for and often achieves. *Persona* crowns that interest, in ways that none of his earlier films hints at except, indirectly, *Smiles of a Summer Night.* In *Persona,* the relationship of the two characters, the self-willed invalid Elisabet and her nurse Alma, both circumscribes and keeps us vividly aware of the relationship of the two magnificent actresses to their work as performers. The acting process, in other words, is inseparable from the interaction of the two characters; the movie is, I would say, centrally about the seduction and power of acting.

The attention to truth in acting in Bergman's young movies comes naturally out of his stage training and his roots in theatrical realism. The 1948 *Port of Call,* for example, recalls Ibsen in its melodrama structure and in the theme of the inescapable past, Strindberg in the horrific domestic scenes and especially in the depiction of the poisonous marriage of the heroine's miserable parents, and O'Neill's *Anna Christie* in the story line. Indeed, nothing would distinguish this film, aside from Bergman's skill at evoking the unsettled feeling of life in a port town, if it were not for the quality of Nine-Christine Jönsson's and Bengt Eklund's performances as the blighted young couple. Bergman's intelligence and delicacy as an actor's director ground his early films. He experimented with a number of styles in his first decade as a film direc-

tor: kitchen-sink realism *(Monika),* expressionism *(The Naked Night),* imitation-Hollywood glamour soap opera *(Dreams),* farce and comedy of manners *(Smiles of a Summer Night).* Meanwhile, collaborating with the first version of his stock company, which included Eva Dahlbeck, Harriet Andersson, Gunnar Björnstrand, Naima Wifstrand, Birger Malmsten, Björn Bjelvenstam, and others, he was working, consciously or unconsciously, toward forging a new kind of realism in screen acting that would provide a solid, familiar support for the archetypal characters he depicted in his movies of the late 1950s and 1960s. In other words, when his movies became more fanciful and abstract, the believability of the performances, their recognizable human element , offered a bridge to this strange world. This is as true for *The Seventh Seal,* with its medieval setting, as it is for the apocalyptic war film *Shame* – two examples of allegorical filmmaking rendered fully plausible and accessible by realist acting.

You can see this balance as early as 1951, in *Summer Interlude.* It is clear that Bergman wants this tale of a ballerina's first love, the loss of which ages and embitters her and almost freezes her soul, to stand for all our remembered youthful romances. You can feel the impulse toward archetype in the underpopulated set pieces, in the pared-down narrative, which declines to dramatize some of the key plot developments, and especially in the heavily weighted exchange near the end about the life of a dancer, which transpires between the ballerina and an older male member of the company, whose clown-white makeup lends him a ghostly, decaying quality not unlike that of the emcee in *Cabaret.* Yet in most ways *Summer Interlude* is a conventional, if unusually sensitive piece of realist filmmaking, and the textured, detailed acting of the two leading players – Maj-Britt Nilsson as the ballerina, Marie, and Birger Malmsten as the doomed boy, Henrik – enables Bergman to accomplish the double aim of bringing us close to the characters while pulling us through them to a broader understanding of the forces that operate in all young lovers as time picks the pockets of their souls. Nilsson is remarkable: When Marie begins to recall her summer idyll with Henrik, the contrast between the taut, reined-

in, superbly poised prima ballerina of the present-day scenes and the full-faced, gleaming-eyed, physically free adolescent of the flashbacks is so striking that we might almost be watching two different actresses.

A few years later, in *Wild Strawberries,* Victor Sjöstrom's touching performance as the vain, foolish professor provides the spark of humanism that cuts through the solemn allegory and gives the film its charge (just as Ingrid Bergman would a couple of decades further on in a similarly conceived role in *Autumn Sonata*). At his worst, in *Sawdust and Tinsel,* for example, Bergman favors a kind of overly enthusiastic, self-conscious *life-force acting* (to borrow a derogatory term used to describe the recent work of Peter Brook) that equalizes rather than unifies the members of an ensemble. What we might call his second-generation repertory actors – Liv Ullmann, Max von Sydow, Bibi Andersson, Ingrid Thulin – do not fall into the life-force trap as easily. Whatever our opinion may be of the individual pictures these four actors did with Bergman, seldom do we see a flaw in their performances; the power of the acting compensates for the thinness of some of the movies. *The Passion of Anna,* from 1969, is a good example.

In Bergman's 1970s pictures, an unanticipated shift begins to occur in the acting of Liv Ullmann, who has certainly become his muse. Having attained a kind of pinnacle of naturalistic acting in movies like *Shame* and *The Passion of Anna* (and in *The Emigrants* and *The New Land,* which she made for Bergman's compatriot Jan Troell), Ullmann pioneers a new phase in realism where her submersion into the characters she plays is so complete that the actress disappears entirely, the way Robert De Niro would a decade later in his collaboration with Martin Scorsese. This description is not meant as praise. If acting should incorporate both behavior and interpretation, then the approach Ullmann takes to her roles in *Scenes from a Marriage, Face to Face,* and *Autumn Sonata* is counterproductive. In erasing herself, she rips up our path into the characters she plays; we have no signposts to guide us, no way of decoding their behavior. And because Bergman is moralistic and cautionary in these movies – with the blissful exception of *The*

Magic Flute – Ullmann's self-effacing identification with her psychically unraveling characters (especially the suicidal therapist in *Face to Face*) has the effect of enhancing the ugliness of the director's work, exactly the opposite effect of her acting in something like *The Passion of Anna*. The American critic Robert Warshow once complained, in a review of William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives*, that the actress Teresa Wright slouched over a stove in one scene is "so much like a real woman over a real stove that the scene can become almost unpleasant, as it was certainly not intended to be,"[2] and while I think he is wrong about Teresa Wright, the criticism would be just if it were leveled at Liv Ullmann in *Face to Face*. Moreover, I believe the truth Ullmann attains here is a sham because it is too puny to be significant – the life it is meant to evoke has been shriveled by the small-mindedness of Bergman's conception. It seems noteworthy that Ullmann's career faded out after these mid-1970s Bergman films. She had vanished into the screen; there was no actress left.

The idea of performance is evoked in theme, characters, setting in *Three Strange Loves, Summer Interlude, The Naked Night, Smiles of a Summer Night, Wild Strawberries, The Magician, The Magic Flute, The Serpent's Egg, Autumn Sonata,* and *Fanny and Alexander* as well as in *Persona*. But only in *Smiles of a Summer Night* and *Persona* is the narrative conceived fully in terms of a sustained performance metaphor. Early in *Smiles of a Summer Night,* the lawyer Fredrik Egerman (Gunnar Björnstrand) takes his young bride Anne (Ulla Jacobsson) to see his former mistress, Desirée Armfeldt (Eva Dahlbeck), starring in a comedy. In this highly artificial play-within-a-film, Desirée – first bowing graciously, her fan fluttering, to receive the applause of the audience – smiles gaily as she delivers her opening lines about the importance of protecting the tender dignity of a lover. Here Bergman layers one precisely achieved style (that of Desirée's eighteenth-century stage play) onto another (that of his own comedy), and Desirée's speech mirrors the story he wants to tell. Fredrik is the lover whose tender dignity is assailed constantly throughout *Smiles of a Summer Night.* Desirée's current inamorato, the hilariously self-inflated dragoon

Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm (Jarl Kulle), surprises Fredrik in her house, dressed in the count's nightshirt while his own clothes are drying (he fell into a puddle on the way), and sends him home to Anne in the middle of the night in this humiliating state. For the second time that evening events have thrown the distinguished advocate off his guard; the first was his discovery that Desirée, who has been out of his life for several years, has a little son who bears his Christian name (although she refuses to identify the boy as his). When he stutters in confusion and indignation, she responds by playing a mock-melodramatic scene, burlesquing Fredrik's conventional male response. This isn't the theater, she lectures him impatiently. "But it's farce all the same." Desirée's line is the perfect stage cue: enter Count Malcolm with a tremendous flourish, a monocle affixed to his eye, showing not the smallest dent in his supreme hauteur as he discovers another man parading around in his nightshirt.

Fredrik's life at home is a farce too. Anne plays the role of his bride, but she withholds the single element – sex – that would bring her performance to life. She talks about consummating their marriage and bearing his child, but talk is all it is – she is like a little girl playing house; Fredrik's mournful son Henrik (Björn Bjelvenstam), another innocent, is far better suited to her. Henrik is also miserable in the role he has chosen: He is studying for the ministry, but the temptations of the flesh are too much for him to bear. He tries to lose his virginity to the maid, Petra (Harriet Andersson), with his father's blessing, but their assignation fails, and he is more anguished than ever. Around Anne, who torments him because her role as Fredrik's wife bores and exasperates her and because she is really in love with her stepson (although too immature to recognize her own feelings), Henrik acts like a sad-eyed clown, acceding to all her demands, enduring all her insults.

All these characters, including the count's long-suffering wife Charlotte (Margit Carlqvist), an old schoolmate of Anne's, end up together at a dinner party at Desirée's mother's country estate. The extraordinary old lady (Naima Wifstrand) presides over a formal banquet, where her guests, decked out in their grandest costumes,

do witty battle for their spouses and lovers over the wine. Henrik, disgusted with their follies and his own, makes a scene and rushes out of the room in disgrace. Entrances and exits are crucial in this film, never more so than in this climactic scene, where Anne, impelled to go after her stepson, nearly faints (ostensibly from the effects of the strong wine) and has to be taken to her room by Petra, at the same time the invalid Mme. Armfeldt is carried off by her servants to the yellow pavilion, where she serves coffee and liqueurs to her guests. There Desirée strums guitar and sings *Freut Euch des Lebens,* and, as an antique clock strikes the late hour, porcelain figures dance out of it like actors taking their curtain calls.

But the farce is not over yet. Henrik, alone and in agony, cries aloud, "Lord, if the world is sinful, then I want to sin. Take my virtue away from me!" Twisted up in a curtain, he staggers around the room in besotted dismay and lands up against a trick bell that was installed by a lascivious lord to whisk the women he desired into his presence. Magically, to a music-box tune, a bed appears through a false wall with Anne fast asleep on it. This theatrical vision enables the young would-be lovers to ascend to their destined happy ending. Henrik kisses his Sleeping Beauty, who awakens to the realization that she has loved him all along, and they make immediate plans to elope.

But the focus of *Smiles of a Summer Night* is not on the young lovers, poised tremulously on the brink of their lives, but on the middle-aged ones, buffeted by disappointment, giving the film its wistful tone, making it truly modernist, and linking it to the greatest of all cinematic high comedies, Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* (1939). Fredrik arrives just in time to see his wife kiss his son and make off with him by coach in the middle of the night. The cuckold slips into the shadows; he knows he does not belong in a romantic comedy or a fairy tale. He has his own scene to play: a game of Russian roulette with his rival, Count Malcolm. Although the game ends badly for him when he fires the single bullet in the dragoon's dueling pistol, it turns out that Carl-Magnus has used a blank, and Fredrik ends up merely looking foolish, his face blackened with powder, rather than dead. He has detoured from tragedy into farce, and as Desirée wipes the soot lovingly off his face, she

affirms the difference between these two genres: "Your fall has been very great, Fredrik Egerman . . . but you're falling softly!" Bergman gives the curtain line of his comedy to Petra the maid, who announces, "The clowns will have a cup of coffee in the kitchen."

I have spent a long time on *Smiles of a Summer Night* because Bergman's use of theatrical devices and performance styles as a way of conveying his themes and developing his characters prefigures what he does a decade later in *Persona* – where, however, both tone and style are strikingly different. Whereas he employs an ensemble in *Smiles of a Summer Night, Persona* is effectively a two-hander, a tug-of-war between Liv Ullmann's Elisabet Vogler and Bibi Andersson's Sister Alma, with abbreviated guest appearances by Elisabet's doctor (played by Margaretha Krook) and her estranged husband (Gunnar Björnstrand). Again one of the characters is an actress, and again we see her, briefly, on stage: in a performance of Euripides' *Electra.* Something happened to Elisabet that night: She saw or felt something, then she broke character like the mime Deburau in Carné's *Children of Paradise* (1945), whose love for the woman he can never have, whom he glimpses in a corner of the theater, slices into the vein of his performance and momentarily stops the show. The doctor at the sanitarium where Elisabet spends several months after this incident theorizes that her behavior is a willful refusal to play the roles she has been assigned in real life and insists, sarcastically, that even this silence is a role she will tire of eventually, like all her others. *Persona* neither confirms nor denies this interpretation: Elisabet's silence is merely the premise for the drama, which is the relationship between the mute actress and the nurse employed to care for her during a sort of imposed vacation at the doctor's country house by the sea.

Bergman made *Persona* in 1966, in the middle of the long phase in his career when he was filming chamber dramas with his constricted repertory company on an island off the Swedish coast. In this case, the drama is so stripped down that it comments on his methodology – his bizarrely insulated way of working; that the commentary is intended is confirmed by the self-consciousness of the movie's opening.

Because only Bibi Andersson speaks, the stars are forced into

Andersson, Ullmann, and Bergman on location

two unusual, stylized modes: monologue and mime. (There are three exceptions: Elisabet does speak in a strange nocturnal exchange that Alma probably imagines, when Elisabet appears in her bedroom; in the terrifying moment when Alma's threatening to scald her provokes an involuntary verbal response; and just before the end, when Alma succeeds in getting her to say, ironically, "Nothing.") Ullmann does not perform classical mime, of course (as Jean-Louis Barrault did as Deburau in *Children of Paradise*), but naturalistic mime (as in the moment when Deburau breaks character), so we do not have a conventional key to decode

her. She is the mystery that we, along with Alma, are trying to unravel, although at some point Alma becomes embroiled in Elisabet's mystery in a far more personal way – it becomes the mystery of her own persona. But as we watch the permutations in Alma's relationship with Elisabet, the economy of means that Bergman and the two stars employ prompts us to focus on the way in which Andersson and Ullmann use the few variables at their disposal to create the style of the piece and construct the odd, undefined, constantly shifting link between the two women. The film is, on one level, an extended series of acting exercises: the two-handed monologue, the basic power play or objective-versus-obstacle, the mirror exercise, and the metamorphosis.

Bergman has a distinguished theatrical source for the two-handed monologue: Strindberg's 1889 one-act *The Stronger.* (This is not the last time Bergman will resurrect his old ally: Both *Cries and Whispers* and *Fanny and Alexander* are inspired by Strindberg's *A Dreamplay,* and both *The Father* and *The Dance of Death* inform the bitter, eruptive relationship between the characters Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson play in *Scenes from a Marriage.*) In this extraordinary play, which contains perhaps ten pages of text, two actresses, Mrs. X and Miss Y, meet by chance at a café for ladies on Christmas Eve, and in the course of their encounter, Mrs. X figures out that Miss Y has had an affair with her husband. Mrs. X talks and Miss Y listens, silently facilitating Mrs. X's revelation or else commenting on it, depending on how the actresses and the director elect to play the scene. Similarly, the stronger is either the verbal Mrs. X, who declares victory over her rival when she goes off to reclaim her husband, or the mute Miss Y, who never admits defeat. The open-endedness of Strindberg's piece, its dramatic pliability, makes it an ideal acting-class text to explore the variety of interpretive choices as well as the subtle power of nonverbal response.

The Stronger begs the question of which character, Mrs. X or Miss Y, is the protagonist; in *Persona* we have to make the same choice. Although the story of *Persona* appears to be focused on Elisabet and not on Alma, and although it is Ullmann's face and not Andersson's that we see first, Andersson takes over the picture as soon as Alma begins to respond to the seductiveness of Elisabet's silence

and, using her patient as a confidante, reveals intimate parts of herself. Most memorably, she tells the story of an orgy she and another young woman engaged in on a beach with a pair of teenage boys while Alma was on vacation with her fiancé. This ten-minute monologue is one of the most brilliantly sustained pieces of acting in movies, and its effect on a viewer is hypnotic.

In terms of structure, the speech can be divided into two acts, with the orgy occurring in several distinct phases in Act One and its aftermath in Act Two. Andersson begins the speech softly, quietly, almost like a reverie, concentrating on the visual elements and details of sequence, place, and mood. She gives the impression that she is examining this memory, turning it in her hand like a snow globe, while at the same time she is reliving it, and in the reliving she suddenly seems younger, even childlike. In close-up, we observe Alma observing her younger self and Katrina, the other woman, and the two schoolboys as she and Katrina become aware of their presence, ogling these two nude sunbathers. She rocks herself over on her side, nursing the sexual reminiscence. Her tone changes when sex enters the story: First she sounds both amazed and appalled as she watches Katrina seduce the older of the two boys, then we hear her own desire and her laughter as she moves from the role of voyeur to that of sexual actor – tenderly, breathlessly. What seems most extraordinary about Andersson's recitation of the story is its utter freedom from embarrassment, even as it bounds into the second round of sex (which engages the younger boy), ending joyously with a swim in the sea.

Act Two is the poignant part, the heartbreaker. Karl-Henrik, Alma's boyfriend, returns from the city, and after wine and dinner, they go to bed and have great sex. We never had it so good together, never, Alma insists, wounded by the memory and by the injustice of it all: She got pregnant that night and opted for an abortion. By this time Alma is crying, trying vainly to make sense of the crazy twist of events that seemed somehow to signal the end of her youth, of her dreams for the future. "What happens to the things you decided to do?" she demands. "Isn't it necessary at all to do them?"

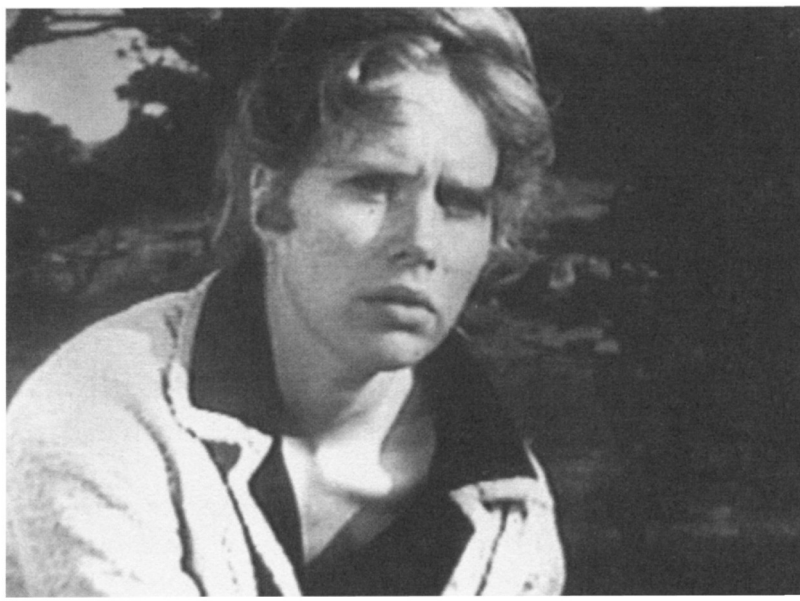
The emotional range of this scene is so breathtaking, and Andersson's performance is so superb, that at first we may not think to focus on Ullmann's Elisabet. But as Bergman directs the scene, her presence is as essential as Alma's. As the monologue starts, Elisabet is sitting up in bed, in the background, and Alma is in the foreground, on the right side of the frame, in an easy chair. Bergman cuts to a setup that emphasizes Andersson more – she is right in the middle of the frame now – but he makes sure to cut back to Elisabet, who is completely and warmly attentive to her nurse's confidence. This sequence occurs more than once in the course of the speech, Bergman focusing on Andersson and then returning to Ullmann. As in *The Stronger,* the monologue is meant to be defined by the relationship of speaker to listener, even though (unlike *The Stronger*) the substance of the monologue does not directly concern the listener at all. What is important here is the role Elisabet plays in permitting Alma to give vent to buried feelings of grief and loss. She listens and she smokes; Alma walks around the room in search of a cigarette for herself, and soon the story of the sexual interlude is over and the anguished part of the memory begins. By now she is lying next to Elisabet, weeping in her arms. We cannot analyze this scene without including Elisabet's role in it. All that happens in this relationship – Alma's feeling of betrayal when she reads Elisabet's letter to the doctor, which reveals, in a slightly condescending tone, the gist of this precious confidence; and then her anger at Elisabet – is set up for us here.

Because all dramatic interactions are premised on the attempts of characters to fulfill a need or desire against the weight of obstacles (supplied either by each other or by exterior sources), in the most basic acting exercise an actor defines an objective and tries to pursue (or play) it, exploring various tactics toward achieving it. If the two scene partners are working toward opposing objectives, then the exercise may also be a struggle for power. In *Persona,* although the characters are complex, the dramatic situation is so drastically reduced that it seems almost absurdist: two women in a beach cottage, one of whom does all the talking. And in a sense

most of the film can be seen in acting terms as Alma's attempt to get Elisabet to speak, which Elisabet refuses to do. I am not suggesting here that Alma's motivations are not intricate and layered; we can read her at different moments in the film as wanting companionship, consolation, understanding, mothering, but the constant through all these phases is her need to make Elisabet speak. She reads Elisabet a painful, personal letter from her husband, but rather than comment, Elisabet grabs it out of Alma's hands. She tells Elisabet the long, emotionally dense story of the beach orgy and its aftermath, but rather than offer counsel or reciprocate with a confidence of her own, Elisabet simply holds her. Alma wants verbal contact so badly that she even fantasizes (presumably) that Elisabet comes to her room and speaks to her while she sleeps, but when she asks the next day if this incident really happened, Elisabet's only reply is to shake her head. After Alma reads the letter to the doctor, she punishes Elisabet by leaving a shard of glass in front of the door, and when Elisabet cuts her foot on it, we see in the look she gives her nurse that she understands Alma deliberately created this danger but that look of shock is the only response Elisabet offers. At this point Alma's need to hear something from Elisabet becomes desperate: She chases after her, explaining and censuring, pouting and apologizing; she pleads with Elisabet to speak to her. But the only tactic that works – briefly – is Alma's threat to hurl boiling water in her face. And immediately after this outburst, Elisabet, with a smirk, resumes her silence.

Using the two-handed monologue, Bergman and the actresses keep us conscious of the roles of both characters. But the objective-obstacle exercise confirms one of the movie's essential puzzles: Although Alma's objective is clear, we do not have any idea what Elisabet wants. Ullmann suggests a range of emotions in this film, but dramatically her only role is that of silent resister.

The mirror exercise is another acting-class basic. Two actors face each other; one initiates a series of movements while the other plays mirror image, trying to duplicate each movement as pre-



cisely as possible; then, at some point, the two actors switch roles. For all that has been written about their similarity, Andersson and Ullmann are not truly look-alikes, and in fact Bergman continually underscores the physical differences between them – especially Ullmann's long, sensuous hair, worn down her back in a ponytail in some scenes, and Andersson's short, more practical and more girlish cut. Yet the two characters are drawn into a reflective relationship with each other, and it is never clear which one of them is the mirror image. Is Alma aping Elisabet, trying to be like her? (Does she, for example, reach for a cigarette in the middle of the erotic confession because Elisabet is smoking?) Or does she see in Elisabet a mirror image of herself, and is that why she is mesmerized by her?

The mystery at the heart of *Persona* is the mystery of identity, articulated by Bergman and his two actresses chiefly in two ways. The first is this mirror exercise, in which we cannot say for sure which of the two women is the initiator and which is the responding mirror. The other is the metamorphosis, a process whereby an actor undergoes a dramatic mutation of some kind. There are many such exercises, but the most pertinent one for a discussion of *Persona* can be found in its purest form in any number of scenes from Harold Pinter's plays. Often his characters begin in one kind of emotional, sexual, and/or power connection to each other, with one set of objectives, then shift in midscene, so that the solicitor becomes the controller, the abuser becomes the victim, the innocent becomes the manipulator, and so on. Pinter's appeal for many theatergoers and scholars lies in those shifts, his distinctive way of pulling the rug out from under us. Bergman's emotional focus is different from Pinter's: for Pinter, identity is only the consequence of power relationships; Bergman is far less interested in power and far more fascinated by identity for its own sake.

The central image of *Persona* – the unforgettable "mirror" shot in which the two women's faces merge – is, of course, an image of metamorphosis. The problem, for this viewer at least, is that its power unbalances the movie. In the second half, Bergman keeps returning to it, as if he realized that he had played his best card too

early. And the psychological changes in Alma after she reads Elisabet's letter to the doctor, which are his initial attempt at dramatizing the shift of identity this great image expresses, constitute the weakest section of the movie. This stage of Alma's metamorphosis is shrill and (despite Bibi Andersson's superlative acting) unconvincing, the way Pinter's transformative scenes always are for me. Overall, I would say the acting-exercise subtext of *Persona* is most effective when it calls up the legacy of Strindberg, weakest when it is most like Pinter.

Both the theatrical background for Elisabet's character and her story and Bergman's naked use of acting exercises to define and probe the relationship of the two women are as thematically resonant in *Persona* as the allusions to the conventions of stage comedy are in *Smiles of a Summer Night.* Bergman lets us know almost immediately that Elisabet is an actress, portraying her in makeup on a stage, and in less obvious ways he begins very early to view Alma as a kind of fledgling actress. She is on camera, providing background about herself, as an actor might be asked to do at an audition, while the doctor remains off camera like a movie director. The first activity we see patient and nurse engage in together is listening to a radio play – Alma's idea, but Elisabet, laughing at the melodrama, shuts it off abruptly, and Alma apologizes, confessing that she does not know much about theater or actors. A few moments later, we see Alma sitting up in bed, applying cold cream to her face – an action that reminds us again of the theatrical process – and as she wonders aloud about Elisabet, Bergman cuts to a shot of the older woman walking about her room in her nightgown like a prisoner in a cell. The juxtaposition of the two scenes suggests that Alma the actress is dreaming her up, just as the boy who would be a director dreamed up Ullmann's face in the opening sequence. Bergman shoots the scene where Alma reads Mr. Vogler's letter to Elisabet in the same way as the exchange between Alma and the doctor: Elisabet is out of camera range, but Alma looks to her for signals, like an actor taking direction. The erotic monologue builds on this scene: Alma performs for Elisabet's approval (even though this time the director is on

camera, watching from her bed as from a front-row seat while the actor moves about the room as if it were a stage set).

This setup is crucial for understanding the film's movement away from Elisabet, whose story seems at first to be Bergman's focus, to Alma, who is its true protagonist. Alma is in thrall to Elisabet almost from the outset, as a fan is to an adored star. And when she shows signs of identifying with Elisabet, we may think of both the innocent and the neurotic ways in which a fan projects herself onto a celebrity. Elisabet's silence encourages that projection just as a celebrity's distance unwittingly encourages it in a fan. After all, Elisabet says nothing that might spoil Alma's fantasy version of their relationship. Her attention to Alma's confidences seems entirely compassionate, but how do we really know? We have no idea what she is thinking in this scene, despite Bergman's repeated cutting to her responses, and we may be reading compassion in her face because Alma reads it there – a perspective that seems all the more plausible if we assume the images of Elisabet stealing into Alma's room in the middle of the night are Alma's own dream or wish-fulfillment fantasy. And then, when Alma opens Elisabet's unsealed letter to the doctor, she is devastated to learn that her patient views her from a height, amused by Alma's devotion, which she sees as a sort of crush. She is touched by Alma, too, but that is not, of course, what Alma wants. She is deeply hurt that Elisabet has no more consideration for her privacy than to pass on her story to her employer; more, she feels that Elisabet sees her as a specimen, an object for study, like a role she is preparing.

She rebels against Elisabet's violation of their relationship (as Alma has imagined it) in a number of ways, acting out like a disappointed adolescent, trying to hurt her and then begging her forgiveness. (This is the part of the movie that I characterized earlier as the Pinter section.) Later, unable to sleep that night, she wanders into Elisabet's room, reversing her fantasy image of Elisabet's late-night visitation, and studies *her* as she sleeps. This time it is Alma who views Elisabet in a distanced, judgmental way – and far less kindly than Elisabet viewed her – criticizing the way she looks

Metamorphosis

(flabby-faced) and the way she smells (of sleep and tears). Cruelly stripped of her romantic notion that artists like Elisabet create out of compassion (as she protests in the scene where she confronts Elisabet with the letter), the fan now believes she sees her idol for what she is – and finds her wanting.

It should be clear by now that Alma and not Elisabet is the focus of the picture, but Bergman goes much further than just employing the mute, bewildering image of Elisabet Vogler to illuminate the depths of Sister Alma. The mirror imaging and the merging of the two women permit him not merely to shift the center of the narrative from one to the other but actually to turn Alma into Elisabet. This metamorphosis can be read, along with the earlier scenes, as an examination of the nature of performance. In the movie's strangest episode, Mr. Vogler comes to see his wife and confuses Alma for Elisabet; while Elisabet watches, tacitly approving, he makes love to Alma. Alma might be Elisabet's marionette here, performing at her will, and Bergman shoots the

embrace as if it were a projection of Elisabet's consciousness. But Alma is not exactly a puppet. In the next scene, talking to Elisabet, she narrates the story of the night Vogler got her pregnant, of her resistance to motherhood, of her uneasy relationship with her son. Alma seems to be writing the script of Elisabet's life, forcing Elisabet – who cannot resist, because she will not speak – to play the role as Alma has shaped it. Ullmann's Elisabet looks trapped in this scene – as trapped as the characters in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* who have no choice but to play out the drama that their unknown author has caged them in. Bergman immediately repeats the scene, but this time he places Alma in close-up, in an over-the-shoulder shot from Elisabet's point of view, and when Elisabet turns her head at one point, the faces merge. Then she leaves the frame entirely, so that what we seem to be watching is a monologue by an actress (Alma) who is playing a role (Elisabet) and really getting under the character's skin.

Earlier Alma protested that Elisabet saw her as a mere role to study, but now Bergman has turned the tables. His depiction of Alma as the actress and Elisabet as the role reveals a creepy and highly personal vision of acting as possession: Elisabet is the one who gets under Alma's skin. I am *not* Elisabet Vogler, Alma protests, but she is helpless to maintain her identity and her fluidity. In *The Stronger,* Mrs X cries out against Miss Y's silent power in terms that suggest vampirism:

> Your soul crept into mine, like a worm into an apple, worming its way, boring and boring, until nothing was left but the rind and a speck of black dust inside. I tried to get away from you, but I couldn't! You charmed me, bewitched me like a snake . . . Every time I lifted my wings to escape, I felt myself being dragged down again . . . Ugh! How I detest you, hate you, hate you! But you all you do is sit there silent, cold and impassive![3]

The role of Elisabet is sucking Alma dry; Bergman even supplies an image of Elisabet bending over and drinking the blood from Alma's arm.

The romantic notion of an actor inhabited by a great part is out

of fashion now; actors prefer to speak about what they do in objective, professional tones as work. But all actors know that a role can seize hold in a way that can feel like the invasion of the body snatchers. After the celebrated Italian actress Maria Falconetti performed in Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), she gave up acting entirely because she felt the role had drained all her vitality leaving nothing for her art, and when you watch her in the movie you can really believe she gave everything she had. It is only when Alma is finally successful in getting Elisabet to speak (to say, "Nothing") that she seems to be free of her. That is, her job is done; the part has been ripped out of her; she can go home. *La commedia è finita.*

NOTES

1. This celebrated image was quoted most recently in *The Truman Show* (1998), where the creator of the ongoing television show of Truman's life runs his hand along the inflated image of Truman's innocent face.
2. Robert Warshow, "The Anatomy of Falsehood," in *The Immediate Experience* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 157.
3. August Strindberg, *The Stronger,* in *Seven Plays by August Strindberg,* translated by Arvid Paulsen (New York: Bantam, 1960), 178–179.

GWENDOLYN AUDREY FOSTER

6 Feminist Theory and the Performance of Lesbian Desire in *Persona*

Lesbian feminist theory, and, in particular, performance theory that has emerged in the past decade have particular relevance in a re-vision of *Persona,* a film that is centrally concerned with the performance of lesbian desire. The marked shift toward an emphasis on the production of meaning via spectatorship rather than authorship has facilitated the new queer performative theories. Briefly, performative theory holds that gestures, role playing, and external manifestations of one's physical presence reveal an inner existence, in which the self is "performed" as an act of social expression. Feminist film theorists have moved away from the spectatorial model posited in Laura Mulvey's early writing. Mulvey, although she later modified the position, is famous for her essay, "Visual Pleasure in the Narrative Cinema."[1] Here she established the notion that all cinematic texts address an overdetermined model of spectator, the white male heterosexual. A veritable avalanche of film criticism depended on Mulvey's model, and even when she redefined and revisited this model to begin to develop theories of other spectators, it would be many years before film critics embraced a model of spectatorship that involved queer and female audiences and the queer female psychological theories of spectatorship now seen in the work of writers such as Judith Mayne, Teresa de Lauretis, and Chris Straayer. The remarkable shift to spectator theory opened the space for reading films such as *Persona* against the grain of so-called dominant heterosexual male spectatorship and authorship.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, *Persona,* for example, would be reduced to a heterosexually defined Oedipal drama in which emphasis would be placed on the male construction of a cinematic rendering of psychological desire stemming from Freud's and Lacan's Oedipal phase. In this construction, typically the desire of the male would have been placed center stage, and it would be assumed that only the male spectator could share in such an overdetermined playing out of desire. In the Oedipal scenario, the young boy desires to conquer his mother sexually in order to separate himself from her and begin to grow as an adult. In order for him to succeed, he must destroy his father, his sexual competitor. Obviously this is one scenario that *Persona* lends itself to reconstructing: the young boy/filmmaker symbolically mastering the split mother figure of Alma/Elisabet.

In a construction of meaning of *Persona,* however, from the spectatorial position of a queer feminist, the Oedipal scenario is no longer defined by the male construction or a model of compulsory heterosexuality that seeks to exclude queer spectatorship and queer redefinition of desire and meaning making. The lesbian Oedipal scenario posits that the young female, who wishes to conquer her mother sexually, feels no threat from the father or the law of the father. Unthreatened by the law of the father, I read Alma and Elisabet engaged in the lesbian Oedipal scenario, oscillating in and out of the positions of mother and daughter. Audiences are now viewed less as passive spectators and more as coproducers of meaning. It is in this vein that the performative theories of Judith Butler, Eve Sedgewick, Sue-Ellen Case, and many others have made the case that meaning is not only coproduced but enacted in a performative manner, one that goes beyond theorization and performs the theoretical. Radically queer performative film theory is first and foremost attentive to interventions into the representation of ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and class.

In some ways, it would seem that performance theory and psychoanalytic theories would make strange bedfellows, as indeed they do. Nevertheless, queer feminist performative theories have begun to clear a space for queering those previously heterotopic

paradigms such as the Oedipus complex, the Electra complex, and the reign of the (heterosexually defined) phallus. Thus those utopias dependent on heterosexual readings of *Persona* can be reconstructed as homotopias, or utopias defined by a homosexual spectator. I read *Persona* as such a queertopia, highly aware that my reading is a projection and coproduction of meaning, a performance itself. In my reading, I draw on the queer performative work of Judith Butler, who recently introduced the notion of the "lesbian phallus"[2] primarily as an interjection: a way of understanding lesbian desire according to a queer perspective of psychoanalytic theories that depended on the exclusivity of a heterosexual-defined libidinal economy, one in which the (presumably male heterosexual) phallus supposedly reigned supreme over all as a symbol of sexual power and conquest as well as a symbol of castration fear. By invoking Butler's term, the "lesbian phallus," for example, I begin my queering of the text of *Persona* in the spirit of playful reimagining of the meaning of this film, which is seemingly ripe for a queer intervention reading. As I will argue, my queer feminist reading of *Persona* is a projection of meaning on Bergman, who, in effect, becomes the spectator.

Persona challenges the regime of heterosexuality and its norms primarily through the performance of lesbian desire between Alma (Bibi Andersson) and Elisabet (Liv Ullmann). It is important to keep in mind that *Persona* operates at the level of desire suggestive of a performance of the "lesbian phallus" described by Judith Butler. In order to challenge and displace the heterosexist norms of psychoanalytic theory, Butler playfully invents this term "as a possible site of desire . . . not to refer to an imaginary identification and/or desire that can be measured against a real one; on the contrary, it is simply to promote an alternative imaginary to a hegemonic imaginary."[3] For what is needed to queer *Persona* is not yet another rehash of the film as heterotopic Oedipal drama, but a transgressive reading from the point of view of lesbian spectatorship, feminist spectatorship, and authorial spectatorship. It is high time for lesbian intervention of this text because it demonstrates, repeatedly, the performance of lesbian looks of exchange and

female bonding that challenge heterotopic norms. As Chris Straayer notes, "Acknowledgment of the female initiated active sexuality and sexualized activity of lesbians has the potential to reopen a space in which straight women as well as lesbians can exercise self-determined pleasure."[4]

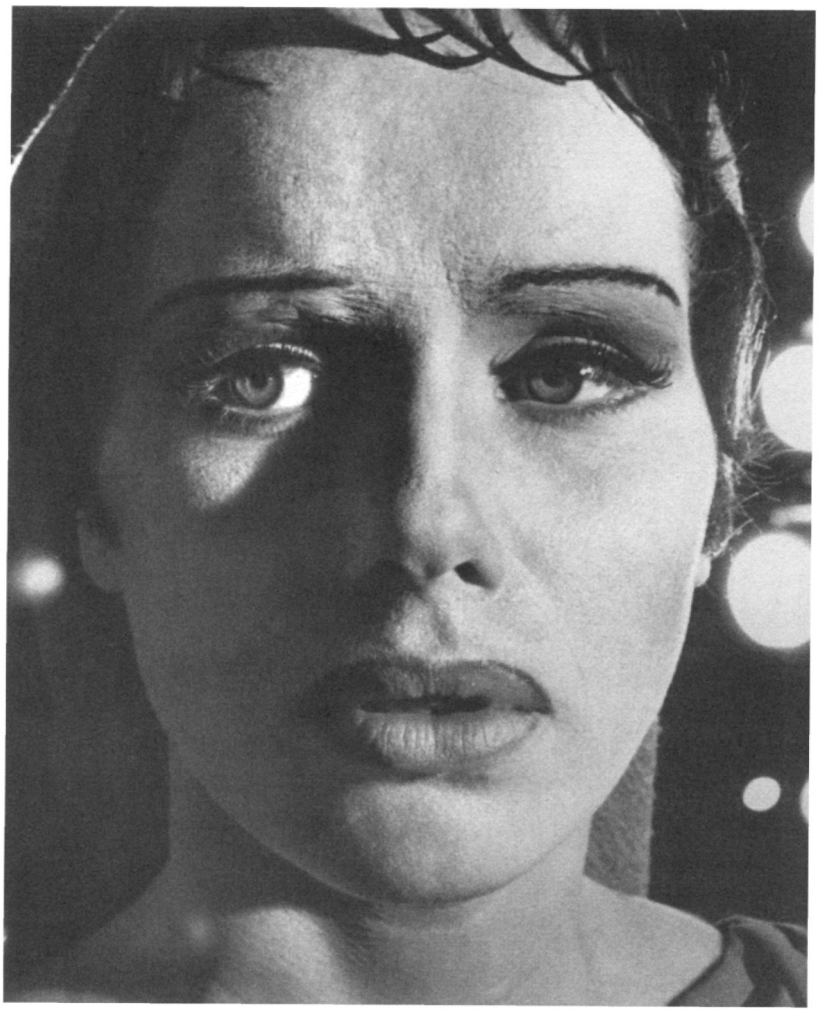
It seems astounding, in fact, that so much of the literature on *Persona* avoids any discussion of lesbian desire, but perhaps this lack says more about critical heterosexual privilege than authorial intent or desire. Bergman himself avoided overdetermined readings of his work, yet he freely gave his audience credit as creators and coproducers of his films. In fact, he saw this as a moral obligation. In a seminar interview with G. William Jones, held in 1980, Bergman stated, "That is the only moral of the theater; you make your work for the audience, for the human beings outside there in the dark. If you make it the right way, the performance is not here on the stage, but the performance is inside the human beings sitting out there in the dark."[5] Bergman seems highly aware of the power of performativity, its Brechtian possibilities for a dialectical engagement with materialities and desires and openings for performative audience readings and pleasures. The film looks at us and invites us into its regime of desire with a clearly queer agenda. The prologue of the original European version of *Persona* contains a shot of an erect penis, an image cut from the American release. However, in the final American version, one of the first images that performs the lesbian phallus of desire is a brief shot of female lips sandwiched between the title cards for Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann. Set on their side, these lips immediately connote and perform the image of the vagina as it is viewed by French feminists, as Kristeva's "chora," or a space that precedes patriarchal and heterosexist hegemony. This image is particularly important in a queer reading of *Persona,* because it has been assigned a heterosexist meaning, or at least it has not been performed as in a queer libidinal economy. Similarly, Elisabet Vogler's famous "breakdown," as she suddenly stops performing Electra and looks at the audience, may be read as a rupture of the heterotopic gaze rather than simply a self-reflexive gesture that breaks down the

fourth wall to initiate the audience into an engagement with the issue of the mask, the performer, and performativity.

It is, of course, all these things, but there is plenty to support a feminist and a queer reading of this important rupture. *Persona* is strewn with such elements that mark it as a queer feminist moment in the 1960s. It is certainly not a film of straightforward representation of "positive" images of lesbian identity; however, it is remarkably an exemplification of then new narrative codes and forms of performative enunciation that, Teresa de Lauretis notes, "may produce modes of representing that effectively alter the standard frame of reference and visibility, the conditions of the visible, what can be seen and represented."[6] This is not to suggest that *Persona*'s performative practice of lesbian sexuality is without its problematics. It is quite possible to read the representation of lesbianism in *Persona* as heterosexually conceived and heterosexist. Much of the lesbian performativity is informed by a framing narrative that is suggestive of yet another recreation of the mother/child bond, and it is also marked by regression, narcissism, and unfulfilled desire, skirting popular homophobic definitions of lesbian desire. Nevertheless, as Judith Mayne points out,

> The definition of lesbianism as an extension of female bonding or mother love is one to which many lesbians have been drawn. Within contemporary lesbianism, there are competing definitions of what lesbianism is, from the most intense form of female and feminist bonding (as theorized by Adrienne Rich in her controversial lesbian continuum), to a sexuality that is distinctly different from heterosexuality, whether practiced by men or women.[7]

The pre-Oedipal bond in *Persona* is primarily that between Alma/Elisabet and the filmmaker's stand-in, the young boy who seems to wish to merge with the lesbian mother and her lover, although they seemingly do not respond to his desire. Instead, these two women later perform feminisms and lesbianisms that disrupt the standard reference frame of visibility. They perform and make visible dissatisfaction with patriarchal limitations as they make visible the possibilities of lesbian desire in ways that are quite remarkable. Alma's speech utterances perform dissatisfaction



with societal expectations of women. Immediately upon meeting her "patient," she flatly states what society expects of her, "I'm 25 and engaged." Later she adds, "I'll marry Karl-Henrik and we'll have children whom I'll bring up. That's all settled," but Elisabet's silence and her performative stare challenge Alma. She is afraid of what she is denying in herself. As Alma tells her supervisor, Elisabet seems "almost childish, but then you see her eyes and everything." Elisabet's eyes act as a classic Lacanian mirror, only here

they challenge heterosexist norms. Alma responds with fear. Elisabet frightens her. She thinks of resigning. "I might not be equal to it," she states. The female psychologist also performs a disrupting woman who sees through the masks of performed identity in heterosexist society.

In an astounding scene, the analyst states that she comprehends Elisabet's retreat into silence and disobedience. She tells Elisabet that she understands what it is like to feel that "every inflection and every gesture (is) a lie, every smile a grimace." Elisabet peels an apple as the analyst says this, as if to suggest a feminist reworking of the Eve myth. This is only one of many critiques of the performances of women's lives as they are restricted by heterotopic norms. Alma admits, for example, that for one male lover, "I never really existed to him." Increasingly, Elisabet responds to Alma's suffering with the stroking of Alma's face and hair. The physical gestures of female bonding are, however, subordinate to the performance of listening.

Elisabet silently listens to Alma's life and, at least in Alma's eyes, she is the only person who has ever listened to her. This listening becomes suffused with sexuality and desire, especially where Alma tells of being made love to, metaphorically, by a woman she met at a beach. In this tale, Alma remembers being naked wIth "Katarina beside me with her breasts and thighs." Through two young boys, the lesbian phallus is performed. In other words, in Alma's tale, she does not directly make love to Katarina. Instead Katarina has sex with one of the boys and Alma has sex with another, but clearly the most satisfying erotic component is the desire between Alma and Katarina. As Alma "came again and again," it is not the phallocentric order of heterosexual sex which she finds memorable, but instead the fact that Katarina was watching and holding the boy from behind. Next, as Alma remembers it, Katarina masturbates using the boy's hand, again indirectly consummating their lesbian desire.

As Alma metaphorically reperforms and reenunciates this tale, we recognize that she is seducing Elisabet as Katarina had seduced her. Although they are at opposite ends of the room, Elisabet listening and Alma performing, the scene is a simulacrum of itself, a

copy of the scene at the beach, culminating in an orgasm for Elisabet, who immediately lights up a cigarette in a postcoital performance of sexual satiation. But their "queertopia" is almost immediately interfered with by the intrusion of patriarchal limitations. Alma explains that she got pregnant as a result of the tryst and had an abortion.

Heterosexual sex is almost always associated with abortion and pain in *Persona,* whereas homosexual sex is associated with fear of and fascination at the merging of identity. This merging, it could be argued, arises from the shared bond of sisterhood that seems to be growing between Alma and Elisabet, who now become physically bonded by Alma's pain and remembrance of her abortion. As Alma weeps, Elisabet takes her into her arms and consoles her in a motherly fashion. The sharing of performative space becomes a metaphoric site of lesbian mother/daughter love, but at the same time the specter of loss of identity is aroused with Alma's comment, "Can you be two people at once?" Bergman has staged their embrace as a tableau vivant of mother and daughter that is conducive to a queer critical reading.

The sexuality performed here is distinctively different from most depictions of heterosexuality and seems more of an exemplification of the kind of female bonding and mother/daughter love identified by Judith Mayne. Nevertheless, the specter of narcissism is strongly evoked in the increasingly sadomasochistic relationship between the two women. Alma gets drunk and betrays her hostility toward Elisabet. She says she has seen her movies, "and they are all alike." Alma thus threatens Elisabet with an emerging lesbian phallus of desire, which is centrally concerned with the threat of lesbian submersion of identity. "I think I could change myself to be you," states Alma, in a way threatening and in a way seducing Elisabet, and she adds, "I mean inside me."

The relationship between the two women is clearly bound by a formidable challenge of will, which culminates in Elisabet's denial of their sexual passion after the famed scene in which Elisabet comes to Alma's bedroom to seduce her. A queer reading of the problematic of subsumed identity might center itself around the struggle not for identity itself, but over sexual pleasure. The strug-

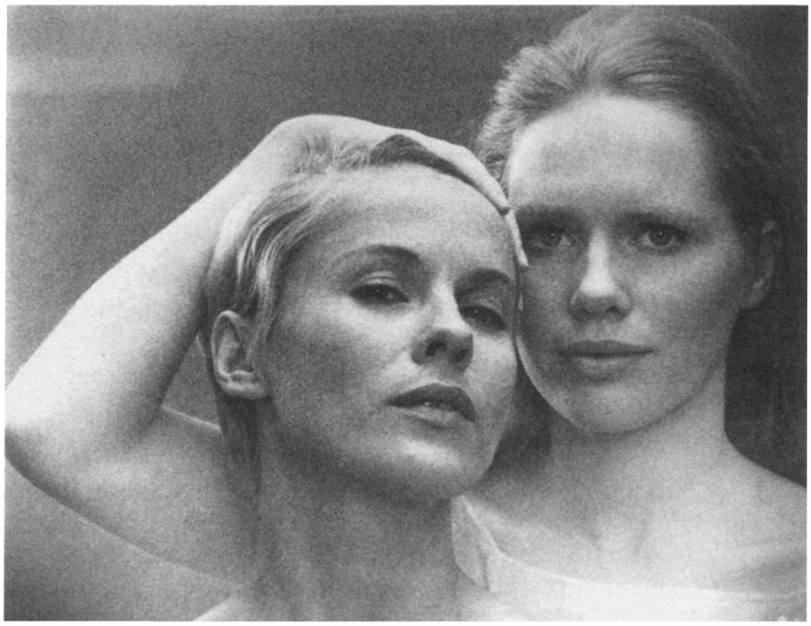
gle between them is not so much about personal identity then, but about ownership of the lesbian phallus, that site of female desire and pleasure which promotes an alternative imaginary beyond patriarchal and heterotopic imaginations.

Elisabet and Alma are lesbian runaways obsessed with fear of subsuming their identities, yet they are equally drawn to that very libidinal fantasy of Oedipal mother/daughter desire. As Patricia White asserts, Oedipal fantasy "whether positive or negative, pre- or post-, revisionist or reactionary, . . . as a fantasy, and as an instance of lesbian self-representation, may effectively and affectively engage the lesbian spectator."[8]

Perhaps it is important here to note that I am deprivileging the Oedipal scenario of the young boy, Bergman's stand-in, and foregrounding the lesbian Oedipal scenario between Alma and Elisabet. The question remains, is the lesbian fantasy only a production of the metanarrative of the young boy and the director? Is it possible, through audience participation and intervention, to renarrate and reperform *Persona* as a lesbian Oedipal scenario? Spectatorial identification is solicited and encouraged by the film as performance. The Oedipal seduction fantasy is played out through the firmly lesbian seduction scenario that has been read by some critics as Alma's dream.

I refer to the bedchamber scene in which Alma awaits her sexual seduction by Elisabet, who comes into Alma's room and embraces her. Interestingly, it is when the two embrace that the director introduces again the self-reflective gaze at the audience. The women stare at us, inviting direct spectatorial identification as Elisabet strokes Alma's hair. The film jump-cuts to a shot of Elisabet taking a photograph of us. This direct engagement with the text, of course, breaks down the fourth wall. The film "looks at us," in the sense articulated by Wheeler Winston Dixon:

> What kind of a mirror are we being offered in these, and other texts, that confront us with a gaze of their own creation, or inflict our own inquisitive glance back at us, questioning and confirming our roles as spectators/participants within the fictive domain of popular entertainment?[9]



The mirror we are engaging in is, I suggest, multifaceted and open to queer, heterosexual, bisexual, or transgendered spectatorial pleasure and identification. We become participants in the performative space of lesbian fantasy, and it becomes a moot point whether or not this scene is merely Alma's dream sequence or Bergman's fantasy sequence. It is now, in our reperformance as spectators, *our* fantasy, and we are free to incorporate it into our own libidinal economy and spectatorial pleasure. Similarly, although *Persona* is bookended by a primal scene suggestive of spectatorial identification with the camera, projector, and the look back of the camera, *Persona* fetishizes the spectatorial mirror. As Christian Metz writes,

> Am I not looking at myself looking at the film? This passion for seeing (and also hearing), the foundation of the whole edifice, am I not turning it, too, on (against) that edifice? Am I not still the voyeur I was in front of the screen, now that it is this voyeur who is being seen, thus postulating a second voyeur, the one writing at present, myself again?[10]

Thus, in some way, as spectators and coproducers, we become complicitous when Elisabet insists that she never came into Alma's room that night, as we become complicitous when Elisabet betrays Alma in a letter in which she announces she has been "studying" her. And when Elisabet accuses Alma, in the letter, of being conscious of her own hypocritical behavior ("she claims her ideas of life don't match her acts"), we are again implied and asked to reflect on our own hypocrisies. Did we witness the lesbian encounter? Do we identify with Elisabet, who seemingly wishes to erase her own lesbian desire? Are we to be the mirror of a text that seems both to celebrate and deny the lesbian phallus and the performance of lesbian desire, group sex, and the psychoanalytic practice itself?

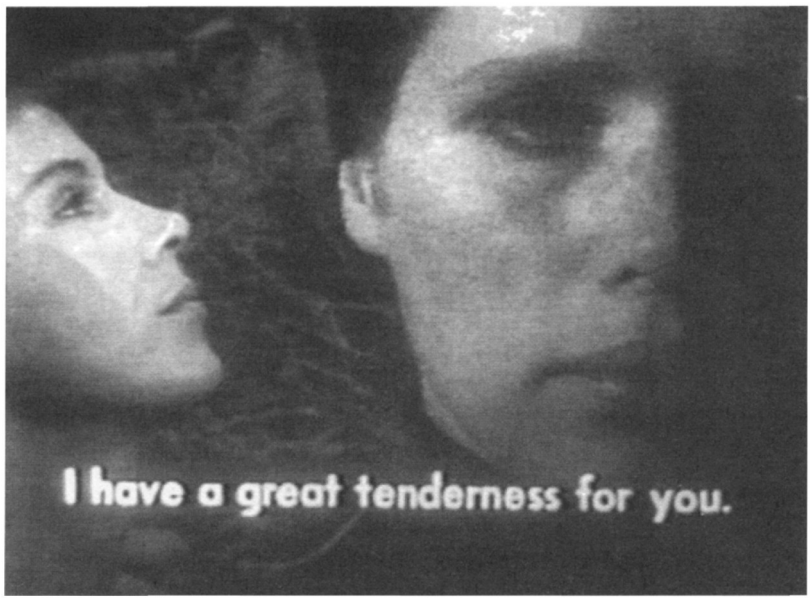
Paisley Livingston writes on the reversals in *Persona:* "The nurse becomes the patient and the patient becomes the nurse. Vogler's silence forms a screen against which Alma projects what one discipline would call phantasms and another her confessions. Finally, the actress becomes a spectator and the nurse a performer."[11] But perhaps the reversal of the role of filmmaker and audience is an even more important element of reversal in *Persona.* Thus, as film-

maker/critic, I can freely project a queer feminist reading on Bergman, who, in effect, becomes the spectator.

The relationship between Alma and Elisabet becomes increasingly sadomasochistic toward the end of *Persona,* and the "couple" becomes more easily identifiable in their roles of the seduced and the abandoned. Their relationship is fraught with pain and infidelity. Alma deliberately leaves broken glass on the ground so that Elisabet will step on it. Alma's image is tortured by a white line dancing through it and subsequently burned through by the projector/filmmaker/audience. Elisabet becomes increasingly submissive as Alma becomes more dominant as the relationship between the couple seems to be moving toward a cathartic moment. The film is in some ways comparable to Wong Kar-Wai's experimental film *Happy Together* (1997), which centers around the torrid and painful love affair between two men (Hong Kong superstars Tony Leung and Leslie Cheung) living as expatriates in Buenos Aires.

Both films suggest that queer passion can at times be so violent that it can destroy as much as it can create. Seeing the films together, one can find clear parallels between scenes of lovers' quarrels and subsequent lonely struggle. The moment in *Persona* in which Alma and Elisabet begin slapping one another and Alma threatens to throw a pot of boiling water at Elisabet is very much like a scene from *Happy Together* in which the male lovers fight and then tenderly console one another. After Alma and Elisabet strike one another, Alma weeps and Elisabet consoles her with a cup of tea. Alma asks why the couple cannot live without lying and quibbling and making excuses. Here the text makes itself perfectly queer by announcing a call for outing. "Maybe you will get better if you stop pretending?" asks Alma, suggesting that Elisabet (and perhaps the complicit audience) refuse to admit that they feel lesbian desires and have consummated them.

Here the narrative is again interrupted by a male interloper, Mr. Vogler, whose voice we hear through the medium of the radio. Alma knows he is calling Elisabet. "I'll find out what he wants. Far away here in our own solitude." Elisabet opens her eyes. She has been pretending to sleep, pretending not to hear Alma consoling her. Elisabet's husband enters the scene and begins addressing



Alma as if she were his wife. Again Alma and Elisabet make love via a male conduit, Elisabet's husband, who offscreen, we presume, makes love to Alma. Mr. Vogler asks Alma, "Was it good for you?" Lesbian sexuality is never directly consummated in *Persona,* at least in the form dictated by heterosexist norms. Instead, sexuality between Alma and Elisabet is informed by a radical refashioning of sexuality through a queer gaze.

This queer gaze is especially apparent in one of the final scenes, which involves a vampire sexual fantasy wherein Alma slices her own arm and Elisabet sucks some blood from the wound. In a beautiful sequence suffused with lesbian desire, we hear church bells ring as Elisabet strokes Alma's hair. We see a shot of Elisabet in makeup as Electra and a self-reflexive shot of Bergman's camera operator shooting a scene of Elisabet in a movie, this movie. The affair over, for both the actors and the audience, themselves implied as participants and "personae," Alma leaves on the bus. We cut to the shot of the little boy touching the belly of the womb (the filmstrip), we see the arc lamp go out, and the film is over.

In some ways, Susan Sontag captured the essence of *Persona* with the statement, "What might be sexual in feeling is largely transposed into something beyond sexuality, beyond eroticism even."[12] However, Sontag's reading largely ignores any queer interventions as spectator. In 1994, Robin Wood writes in "*Persona* Revisited" that he now sees lesbianism in *Persona* as crucial to a critical analysis. Wood rereads the film as a critique of patriarchy and society at large. He points out the importance of the critique of war, as in the inclusion of the Vietnam newsreel, and notes that the film makes clear the "horrors of our world . . . must be attributed overwhelmingly to men."[13] Although perhaps a bit overstated, Wood's point deserves consideration: "What the first (and finest) movement of *Persona* so magnificently and subtly dramatizes is the gradual, tentative empowerment of women through female bonding – 'lesbianism' in the wider sense."[14] Wood notes that it is important to understand how Bergman's choice of *Electra* as a play that Elisabet performs is yet another questioning of the Oedipal symbolic order. In the Electra complex, which involves the daughter identifying with the destroyed mother and results in the woman's obedience to the law of the father, as Wood sees it, "by refusing to continue with the play, Elisabet is rejecting her 'correct' position in the symbolic order."[15]

Bergman wrote of *Persona*, "I have not produced a film script in the normal sense. What I have written seems more like a melody line of a piece of music, which I hope with the help of my colleagues to be able to orchestrate during production."[16] But I submit that the film gains more orchestration in postproduction, in spectatorship, especially in queer performative spectatorship. *Persona* is in some ways comparable to Straub and Huillet's *The Bridegroom, the Comedienne and the Pimp* (1968) in that if offers the audience, even invites them, to participate in making meaning. In one of the most pleasurable moments, in my estimation, a story is told and retold by Alma, once with the camera on Elisabet and once with the camera on Alma. This scene, which Robin Wood finds "obtrusive" and "boring," is central in recognizing the subversive potential of the performative within *Persona*. In its repetitiveness and restaging, this sequence marks the production of a

mode of representation that challenges referentiality itself, not to mention patriarchal-defined referentiality. The cinema of Bergman, like that of Straub/Huillet and, more recently Wong Kar-Wai, invites participatory performance, be it queer or straight.

My reading, invoking Judith Butler's lesbian phallus and feminist theory, would probably not be as theoretically possible with a straightforward representational, nonreflexive film. My use of the term *lesbian phallus* is certainly limited by societal norm and the supremacy of heterosexually defined psychoanalytical film theory. As Judith Butler writes, "the 'lesbian phallus' is a fiction, but perhaps a theoretically useful one, for there are questions of imitation, subversion, and the recirculation of phantasmatic privilege that psychoanalytic informed reading might attend."[17] In any case, queering *Persona* is a liberating performance that shifts the ground under heterosexually defined notions of the symbolic order of "the" phallus, as well as "the" Oedipus and Electra complex. Bergman's text certainly invites such readings and invites the spectator to engage in a variety of coproductions of meaning. Mine is one such example, and it is certainly not meant to be read as an overdetermined model to be overthrown by critics twenty years hence. Instead it is offered in the spirit of *Persona* itself, as a self-reflexive gesture to other viewers to begin their own performances and coproductions of meaning making as critics themselves. *Persona* is one film that perhaps demands such an engagement on the part of the spectator.

NOTES

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2. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 91.
3. Butler, 91.
4. Chris Straayer, "The Hypothetical Lesbian Heroine in Narrative Feature Film," in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Theory,* edited by Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice Welsch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 343.
5. William G. Jones, ed., *Talking with Ingmar Bergman* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1983), 47.
6. Teresa de Lauretis, "Film and the Visible," in *How Do I Look? Queer*

Film and Video, edited by Bad Object Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 224.

7. Judith Mayne, "A Parallax View of Lesbian Authorship," in *Feminisms in the Cinema,* edited by Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 204.
8. Patricia White, "Governing Lesbian Desire: *Nocturne*'s Oedipal Fantasy," in *Feminisms in the Cinema,* edited by Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 91.
9. Wheeler Winston Dixon, *It Looks at You: The Returned Gaze of Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 185.
10. Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* edited by Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 255.
11. Paisley Livingston, *Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 206.
12. Susan Sontag, *"Persona:* The Film in Depth," in *Ingmar Bergman: Essays in Criticism,* edited by Stuart Kaminsky (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 259.
13. Robin Wood, "*Persona* Revisited," *CineAction* 34 (June 1994): 60.
14. Wood, 61.
15. Wood, 61.
16. Peter Cowie, *Ingmar Bergman: A Critical Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1982), 231.
17. Butler, 85.

Filmography

1944

Torment/Frenzy *(Hets)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman and Alf Sjöberg

Director: Alf Sjöberg

Photography: Martin Bodin

Cast: Stig Järrel (Caligula), Alf Kjellin (Jan-Erik Widgren), Mai Zetterling (Berta Olsson), Gösta Cederlund (Pippi), Olof Winnerstrand (the principal), Stig Olin (Sandman)

1946

Crisis *(Kris)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman, from the radio play *Moderhjertet/Moderdyret (The Mother Heart)* (1944) by Leck Fischer

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gösta Roosling

Cast: Dagny Lind (Ingeborg Johnson), Inga Landgré (Nelly), Marianne Löfgren (Jenny), Stig Olin (Jack), Alla Bohlin (Ulf), Ernst Eklund (Uncle Edvard)

It Rains on Our Love or Man with an Umbrella *(Det regnar på vår kärlek)*

Production: Sveriges Folkbiografer

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman and Herbert Grevenius, adapted from the play *Bra mennesker (Good People)* by Oscar Braathen

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Göran Strindberg, Hilding Bladh

Cast: Barbro Kollberg (Maggi), Birger Malmsten (David Lindell), Gösta Cederlund (man with the umbrella), Ludde Gentzel (Håkansson), Douglas Håge (Mr. Andersson), Hjördis Pettersson (Mrs. Andersson)

1947

Woman without a Face *(Kvinna utan ansikte)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Gustav Molander

Photography: Åke Dahlqvist

Cast: Gunn Wållgren (Rut Köhler), Alf Kjellin (Martin Grandé), Anita Björk (Frida Grandé), Stig Olin (Ragnar Ekberg), Olof Winnerstrand (Director Grandé), Marianne Löfgren (Charlotte, Rut's mother)

Ship to India/The Land of Desire *(Skepp till Indialand)*

Production: Sveriges Folkbiografer

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Göran Strindberg

Cast: Holger Löwenadler (Capt. Alexander Blom), Anna Lindahl (Alice, his wife), Birger Malmsten (Johannes Blom), Gertrud Fridh (Sally), Lasse Krantz (Hans, crewman), Jan Molander (Bertil, crewman)

1948

Music in Darkness/Night Is My Future *(Musik i mörker)*

Production: Terraproduktion

Screenplay: Dagmar Edqvist, from her novel (1946) by the same name.

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Göran Strindberg

Cast: Mai Zetterling (Ingred Olofsdotter), Birger Malmsten (Bengt Vyldeke), Bibi Skoglund (Agneta Vyldeke, his sister), Olof Winnerstrand (Kerrman, the vicar), Naima Wifstrand (Beatrice Schröderj), Åke Claesson (Augustin Schröder), Gunnar Björnstrand (Klasson)

Port of Call *(Hamnstad)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Olle Länsberg, Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Nine-Christine Jönsson (Berit Holm), Bengt Eklund (Gösta Andersson), Erik Hell (Berit's father), Berta Hall (Berit's mother), Mimi Nelson (Gertrud), Sture Ericson (Gertrud's father)

Eva

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Gustav Molander, Ingar Bergman, from a synopsis by Ingmar Bergman

Director: Gustav Molander

Photography: Åke Dahlqvist

Cast: Birger Malmsten (Bo), Eva Stiberg (Eva), Eva Dahlbeck (Susanne), Stig Olin (Göran), Åke Claesson (Fredriksson), Wanda Rothgardt

1949

The Devil's Wanton/Prison *(Fängelse)*

Production: Terraproduktion

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Göran Strindberg

Cast: Doris Svedlund (Birgitta Carolina Söderberg), Birger Malmsten (Tomas), Eva Henning (Sofi, his wife), Hasse Ekman

(Martin Grandé, film director), Stig Olin (Peter), Irma Christenson (Linnéa, Birgitta Carolina's sister)

Thirst/Three Strange Loves *(Törst)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Herbert Grevenius, from the collection of short stories *Törst* (1949–1950) by Birgit Tengroth

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Eva Henning (Rut), Birger Malmsten (Bertil, her husband), Birgit Tengroth (Viola), Mimi Nelson (Valborg), Hasse Ekman (Dr. Rosengren), Bengt Eklund (Raoul)

1950

To Joy *(Till glädje)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Maj-Britt Nilsson (Märta Ericsson), Stig Olin (Stig Ericsson), Berit Holmström, Björn Montin (their children), Dagny Lind (grandmother), Victor Sjöström (Sönderby)

While the City Sleeps *(Medan staden sover)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Lars-Eric Kjellgren, from a story by P. A. Fogelström based on a synopsis by Ingmar Bergman

Director: Lars-Eric Kjellgren

Photography: Martin Bodin

Cast: Sven-Erik Gamble (Jompa), Inga Landgré (Iris), Adolf Jahr (her father), Märta Dorff (her mother), Elof Ahrle (Basen), Ulf Palme (Kalle Lund)

High Tension/This Doesn't Happen Here *(Sånt händer inte här)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Herbert Grevenius, from the novel *I Løpet Av Tolv Timer (Within Twelve Hours)* (1944) by Waldemar Brøgger

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Signe Hasso (Vera Irmelin), Alf Kjellin (Björn Almkvist), Ulf Palme (Atkä Natas), Gösta Cederlund (doctor), Yngve Nordwall (Lindell, a policeman), Hannu Kompus (pastor)

1951

Summer Interlude/Illicit Interlude *(Sommarlek)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman, Herbert Grevenius, from the story "Marie" by Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Maj-Britt Nilsson (Marie), Birger Malmsten (Henrik), Alf Kjellin (David), Georg Funkquist (Uncle Erland), Renée Björling (Aunt Elizabeth), Mimi Pollak (Henrik's aunt)

Divorced *(Frånskild)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman, Herbert Grevenius, from a synopsis by Ingmar Bergman

Director: Gustav Molander

Photography: Åke Dahlqvist

Cast: Inga Tidblad (Gertrud Holmgren), Alf Kjellin (Dr. Bertil Nordelius), Doris Svedlund (Marianne Berg), Hjördis Pettersson (Mrs. Nordelius), Håkan Westergren (man on train), Holger Löwenadler (Tore Holmgren, engineer)

1952

Secrets of Women/Waiting Women *(Kvinnors väntan)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Anita Björk (Rakel Lobelius), Jarl Kulle (Kaj), Karl-Arne Holmsten (Eugen Lobelius, Rakel's husband), Maj-Britt Nilsson (Märta Lobelius), Birger Malmsten (Martin Lobelius, Märta's husband), Eva Dahlbeck (Karin Lobelius), Gunnar Björnstrand (Fredrik Lobelius)

1953

Monica/Summer with Monica *(Sommaren med Monika)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman, P.A. Fogelström, from a novel of the same name (1951) by Fogelström

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Harriet Andersson (Monika), Lars Ekborg (Harry), John Harryson (Lelle), Georg Skarstedt (Harry's father), Dagmar Ebbesen (Harry's aunt), Naemi Briese (Monika's mother)

Eve of the Jesters/The Naked Night/Sawdust and Tinsel *(Gycklarnas afton)*

Production: Sandrews

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Hilding Bladh, Göran Strindberg, Sven Nykvist

Cast: Harriet Andersson (Anne), Åke Grönberg (Albert Johansson), Erik Strandmark (Jens), Anders Ek (Frost), Gudrun Brost (Alma), Hasse Ekman (Frans)

1954

A Lesson in Love *(En lektion i kärlek)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Martin Bodin

Cast: Eva Dahlbeck (Marianne Erneman), Gunnar Björnstrand

(Dr. David Erneman, her husband), Yvonne Lombard (Suzanne), Harriet Andersson (Nix), Carl Ström (Uncle Axel), Åke Grönberg (Carl Adam)

1955

Women's Dreams/Dreams/Journey into Autumn *(Kvinnodröm)*

Production: Sandrews

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Hilding Bladh

Cast: Eva Dahlbeck (Susanne), Harriet Andersson (Doris), Gunnar Björnstrand (Consul Sönderby), Sven Lindberg (Palle, her boyfriend), Benkt-Åke Benktsson (Magnus, fashion director)

Smiles of a Summer Night *(Sommarnattens leende)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Eva Dahlbeck (Désirée Armfeldt), Gunnar Björnstrand (Fredrik Egerman), Ulla Jacobsson (Anne Egerman, his wife), Björn Bjelvenstam (Henrik Egerman, Fredrik's son), Harriet Andersson (Petra, the maid), Jarl Kulle (Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm)

1956

The Last Couple Out *(Sista paret ut)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman, Alf Sjöberg, from a story by Ingmar Bergman

Director: Alf Sjöberg

Photography: Martin Bodin

Cast: Björn Bjelvenstam (Bo Dahlin), Olof Widgren (Bo's father), Bibi Andersson (Kerstin), Aino Taube (Kerstin's mother), Harriet Andersson (Anita), Eva Dahlbeck (Bo's mother)

1957

The Seventh Seal *(Det sjunde inseglet)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman, from his play *Wood Painting*

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Max von Sydow (Knight Antonius Block), Gunnar Björnstrand (Squire Jöns), Bengt Ekerot (Death), Nils Poppe (Jof), Bibi Andersson (Mia), Erik Strandmark (Skat)

Wild Strawberries *(Smultronstället)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Victor Sjöström (Prof. Isak Borg), Ingrid Thulin (Marianne, Isak's daughter-in-law), Bibi Andersson (the two Saras), Gunnar Björnstrand (Evald, Isak's son), Folke Sundquist (Anders), Björn Bjelvenstam (Viktor)

Brink of Life/So Close to Life *(Nära livet)*

Production: Nordisk Tonefilm

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Max Wilén

Cast: Ingrid Thulin (Cecilia Ellius), Erland Josephson (Anders Ellius, her husband), Eva Dahlbeck (Christina "Stina" Andersson), Max von Sydow (Harry Andersson, her husband), Bibi Andersson (Hjördis Pettersson), Barbro Hiort af Ornäs (Sister Brita)

1958

The Magician/The Face *(Ansiktet)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Max von Sydow (Albert Emanuel Vogler), Ingred Thulin (Aman/Manda Vogler, his wife), Åke Fridell (Tubal), Naima Wifstrand (Albert's grandmother), Bengt Ekerot (Spegel), Gunnar Björnstrand (Dr. Vergérus), Bibi Andersson (Sara), Toivo Pawlo (Police Chief Starbeck)

1960

The Virgin Spring *(Jungfrukällan)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ulla Isaksson, based on a fourteenth-century legend, "Töre's Daughter in Vänge"

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Sven Nykvist

Cast: Max von Sydow (Töre), Birgitta Valberg (Märeta, his wife), Birgitta Pettersson (Karin, his daughter), Gunnel Lindblom (Ingeri), Axel Düberg (herdsman), Tor Isedal (his mute brother)

The Devil's Eye *(Djävulens öga)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman, based on the Danish play *Don Juan Vender Tilbage (Don Juan Returns)* by Oluf Bang

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Gunnar Fischer

Cast: Gunnar Björnstrand (lecturer), Stig Järrel (Satan), Jarl Kulle (Don Juan), Sture Lagerwall (Pablo, Don Juan's servant), Nils Poppe (vicar), Gertrud Fridh (Renata, his wife), Bibi Andersson (Britt-Marie)

1961

Through a Glass Darkly *(Såsom i en spegel)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Sven Nykvist

Cast: Gunnar Björnstrand (David), Harriet Andersson (Karin, his daughter), Lars Passgård (Minus, his son), Max von Sydow (Martin, Karin's husband)

The Pleasure Garden *(Lustgården)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Buntel Eriksson (pseudonym for Ingmar Bergman and Erland Josephson)

Director: Alf Kjellin

Photography: Gunnar Fischer (Eastmancolor)

Cast: Gunnar Björnstrand (David Franzén), Sickan Carlsson (Fanny), Bibi Andersson (Anna, her daughter), Stig Järrel (Lundberg), Kristina Adolphson (Astrid), Per Myrberg (young pastor)

1962

The Communicants/Winter Light *(Nattvardsgästerna)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Sven Nykvist

Cast: Gunnar Björnstrand (Rev. Tomas Ericsson), Ingrid Thulin (Märta Lundberg), Gunnel Lindblom (Karin Persson), Max von Sydow (Jonas Persson), Allan Edwall (Algot Frövik), Kolbjörn Knudsen (Aronsson, sexton)

1963

The Silence *(Tystnaden)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Sven Nykvist

Cast: Ingrid Thulin (Ester), Gunnel Lindblom (Anna, her sister), Jörgen Lindström (Johan, Anna's son), Håkan Jahnberg (hotel hall porter), Birger Malmsten (waiter in bar), the Eduardinis (dwarfs)

1964

Now About These Women ***(För att inte tala om alla dessa kvinnor)***

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Buntel Eriksson (Ingmar Bergman, Erland Josephson)

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Jarl Kulle (Cornelius), Bibi Andersson (Bumble Bee), Harriet Andersson (Isolde, chambermaid), Eva Dahlbeck (Adelaide, Felix's wife), Karin Kavli (Madame Tussaud), Gertrud Fridh (Traviata)

1966

Persona

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Sven Nykvist

Cast: Bibi Andersson (Sister Alma), Liv Ullmann (Elisabet Vogler), Margaretha Krook (doctor), Gunnar Björnstrand (Mr. Vogler), Jörgen Lindström (boy)

1967

Stimulantia *(Nine Swedish directors – Hans Abramson, Ingmar Bergman, Jörn Donner, Lars Görling, Arne Arnbom, Hans Alfredson and Tage Danielsson, Gustav Molander, Vilgot Sjöman – contributed a short film on a common theme; Ingmar Bergman's segment, entitled "Daniel," is about his and Käbi's son, Daniel, from birth to 2 years of age)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor 16mm) Ingmar Bergman

Cast: Daniel Sebastian Bergman, Käbi Laretei

1968

Hour of the Wolf *(Vargtimmen)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Sven Nykvist

Cast: Max von Sydow (Johan Borg), Liv Ullmann (Alma, his wife), Ingrid Thulin (Veronica Vogler), Georg Rydeberg (Archivist Lindhorst), Erland Josephson (Baron von Merkens), Gertrud Fridh (Corinne, the baron's wife)

Shame/The Shame *(Skammen)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Sven Nykvist

Cast: Liv Ullmann (Eva Rosenberg), Max von Sydow (Jan, her husband), Gunnar Björnstrand (Mayor Jacobi), Birgitta Vahlberg (Mrs. Jacobi), Sigge Fürst (Filip), Hans Alfredson (Lobelius, antiques dealer)

1969

The Ritual/The Rite *(Riten)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri/Sveiges TV/Cinematograph

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Sven Nykvist

Cast: Erik Hell (Judge Abramson), Ingrid Thulin (Thea Winkelmann), Gunnar Björnstrand (Hans Winkelmann, her husband), Anders Ek (Albert Emanuelle Sebastian Fisher), Ingmar Bergman (priest)

A Passion/The Passion of Anna *(En passion)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri/Cinematograph

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor): Sven Nykvist

Cast: Max von Sydow (Andreas Winkelmann), Liv Ullmann (Anna Fromm), Birger Malmsten (Andreas Fromm), Erland Josephson (Elis Vergérus), Bibi Andersson (Eva, his wife), Erik Hell (Johan Andersson)

1970

The Fårö Document *(Fårö-dokument)*

Production: Cinematograph

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (part Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Ingmar Bergman (Interviewer/reporter), local people of Fårö

The Touch *(Beröringen)*

Production: ABC Pictures/Cinematograph

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Bibi Andersson (Karin Vergérus), Max von Sydow (Dr. Andreas Vergérus, her husband), Staffan Hallerstam (Anders, their son), Maria Nolgård (Agnes, their daughter), Barbro Hiort af Ornäs (Karin's mother), Elliott Gould (David Kovac)

1972

Cries and Whispers *(Viskningar och rop)*

Production: Cinematograph/Svensk Filmindustri

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Harriet Andersson (Agnes), Ingrid Thulin (Karin), Liv

Ullmann (Maria), Kari Sylwan (Anna), Erland Josephson (the doctor), Henning Moritzen (Joakim, Maria's husband)

1973

Scenes from a Marriage ***(Scener ur ett Äktenskap)***

Production: Cinematograph

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor, 16mm) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Liv Ullmann (Marianne), Erland Josephson (Johan), Anita Wall (interviewer), Bibi Andersson (Katarina), Jan Malmsjö (Peter), Gunnel Lindblom (Eva)

1975

The Magic Flute ***(Trollflöjten)***

Production: Sveriges TV 2/Cinematograph

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman, based on Mozart's opera, libretto by Schikaneder

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Helene Friberg (girl in audience), Josef Köstlinger (Tamino), Irma Urrila (Pamina), Håkan Hagegård (Papageno), Elisabeth Eriksson (Papagena), Ulrik Cold (Sarastro)

1976

Face to Face ***(Ansikte mot ansikte)***

Production: Cinematograph

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Liv Ullmann (Dr. Jenny Isaksson), Aino Taube (her grandmother), Gunnar Björnstrand (her grandfather), Sven Lindberg (Erik, her husband), Helene Friberg (Anna, Jenny and Erik's daughter), Marianne Aminoff (Jenny's mother)

1977

Ormens ägg/The Serpent's Egg *(Das Schlangenei)*

Production: Rialto Film/Dino De Laurentiis Corporation

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist et al.

Cast: David Carradine (Abel Rosenberg), Hans Eichler (Max, his brother), Gert Fröbe (Inspector Bauer), Liv Ullmann (Manuela Rosenberg), Heinz Bennent (Hans Vergérus), James Whitmore (American priest)

1978

Autumn Sonata *(Höstsonaten)*

Production: Personafilm

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Liv Ullmann (Eva), Lena Nyman (Helena), Ingrid Bergman (Charlotte, their mother), Halvar Björk (Viktor, Eva's husband), Gunnar Björnstrand (Paul, Charlotte's agent), Erland Josephson (Josef), Linn Ullmann (Eva as a child)

1979

Fårö-dokument 1979

Production: Cinematograph

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (color, 16mm) Arne Carlsson

Cast: Ingmar Bergman (interviewer), various people from Fårö

1980

From the Life of the Marionettes *(Aus dem leben der marionetten)*

Production: Personafilm/Bayerische Staatsschauspiel

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (B/W; Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Robert Atzorn (Peter Egerman), Christine Buchegger (Katarina Egerman, his wife), Lola Müthel (Cordelia Egerman, his mother), Martin Benrath (Dr. Mogens Jensen), Rita Russek (Katerina "Ka" Krafft), Walter Schmidinger (Tomas Isidor "Tim" Mandelbaum)

1983

Fanny and Alexander *(Fanny och Alexander)*

Production: Svensk Filmindustri/Sveriges TV 1/Personafilm/Gaumont

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (Eastmancolor) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Gunn Wållgren (Helena Ekdahl), Allan Edwall (Oscar Ekdahl, her son), Ewa Fröling (Emilie, Oscar's wife), Bertil Guve (Alexander, their son), Pernilla Allwin (Fanny, their daughter), Börje Ahlstedt (Carl Ekdahl, Helena's son), Jarl Kulle (Gustaf Adolf Ekdahl), Jan Malmsjö (Bishop Verqerus), Harriet Andersson (Justina), Erland Josephson (Isak Jacobi), Mats Bergman (Aron), Gunnar Björnstrand (Filip Landdahl)

Karin's Face *(Karins ansikte)*

Production: Cinematograph

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (B/W and sepia) Arne Carlsson

1984

After the Rehearsal *(Efter repetitionen)*

Production: Released by Triumph Films

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: (color) Sven Nykvist

Cast: Erland Josephson (Henrik Vogler), Lena Olin (Anna Egerman), Ingrid Thulin (Rakel, her mother), Bertil Guve (Henrik as a young boy), Nadja Palmstjerna-Weiss (Anna as a young girl)

1992

The Best Intentions ***(Den god viljan)***

Production: Channel 1 (Sweden), ZDF (Germany), Channel 4 (England), RAI 2 (Italy), La Sept (France), DR (Denmark), NRK (Norway), YLE (Finland)

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Billie August

Photography: (color) Jörgen Persson

Cast: Samuel Fröler (Henrik Bergman), Mona Malm (Alma Bergman, Henrik's mother), Pernilla August (Anna Bergman), Max von Sydow (Johan Åkerblom, Anna's father), Ghita Nørby (Karin Åkerblom, Anna's mother), Börje Ahlstedt (Uncle Carl Åkerblom)

Sunday's Children ***(Söndagsbarn)***

Production: Sandrews/Svenska Filminstitutet/Sweetland Films/Sveriges Television Kanal 1/Metronome Prods./Finlands Filmstiftelse/Islands Film Fond & Norsk Film with support of Nordic Film and TV fund and Eurimages/Europarâdet

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Daniel Bergman

Photography: (color) Tony Forsberg

Cast: Thommy Berggren (Pu's father), Henrik Linnros (Pu), Lena Endre (Pu's mother), Börje Ahlstedt (Uncle Carl), Jakob Leygraf, Anna Linnros

1995

The Last Gasp ***(Sista Skriket)***

Production: SVT Drama

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Cast: Ingvar Kjellson (Charles Magnusson), Björn Granath (Georg af Klercker), Anna von Rosen (Miss Holm)

1996

Private Confessions *(Enskilda samtal)*

Production: SVT Drama

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Liv Ullmann

Photography: Sven Nykvist

Cast: Pernilla August (Anna), Max von Sydow (Jacob), Samuel Fröler (Henrik), Anita Björk (Karin Åkerblom), Vibeke Falk (Ms. Nylander, housekeeper), Thomas Hanzon (Tomas Egerman), Kristina Adolphson (Maria), Gunnel Fred (Märta Gärdsjö), Hans Alfredson (Bishop Agrell), Bengt Schött (Stille, verger)

1997

In the Presence of a Clown *(Larmar och gör sig till)*

Production: Yleisradio, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, Danmarks Radio, SVT Drama, Nordisk Film & TV-Fond/Nordiska TV-samarbetsfonden, Norsk rikskringkasting, Radiotelevisione Italiana

Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Photography: Tony Forsberg, Irene Wiklund

Cast: Börje Ahlstedt (Uncle Carl Åkerblom), Marie Richardson (Pauline Thibualt), Erland Josephson (Osvald Vogler), Pernilla August (Karin Bergman)

Reviews of *Persona*

MASKS AND ASPECTS

BRENDAN GILL

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Persona is the twenty-seventh full-length movie that Ingmar Bergman has made. Of the twenty-seven, I have seen something over half; of the half, *Persona* is the hardest to take in at a first or second, or even a third, viewing, and as much as I am able to say about it I say pro tem, not because I fear having to diminish my praise of it someday but, on the contrary, because I feel sure that the more I see it the more I will see in it, and the more interesting and, despite the painfulness of its subject matter, the more pleasurable it will become. I hope this confession that I have marched all round the dark tower of *Persona* and have made certain guesses about its interior without actually penetrating it won't be read as a hint that the picture is in fact impenetrable. The truth is that it is in many respects a less mysterious picture than Mr. Bergman's *The Silence,* in which we had to scramble for a coign of vantage in a country unknown to geography and history, with a language unknown to linguists (Bergman, who is supposed to have no sense of humor, wittily made it up), and with two heroines whose sexual and perhaps family relations, though they provided the chief action of the plot, remained as unremittingly ambiguous as the nature of their daily lives. In *Persona,* the setting

is largely the haunting rocky and piney seaside familiar to us from several earlier Bergman movies, and though the action is again provided by two heroines, again caught up in a tangle of curiosity, passion, and disgust, they are here given conventional backgrounds – Elisabeth is a successful actress, Alma a nurse – and they both have, in the cant phrase, everything to live for, being young, healthy, good-looking, and loved.

Moreover, the story told in *Persona* promises at first to be a fairly simple one. Having undergone a sudden, inexplicable breakdown, Elisabeth refuses to speak a word (a silence beyond *The Silence*) and is placed under psychiatric care, with the inexperienced Alma as her nurse. The formidable lady psychiatrist in charge of the case assures Elisabeth that she understands the situation perfectly: in retreating from the world Elisabeth is expressing her dissatisfaction not only with the horror of a lifetime spent in mere seeming instead of being but also with the graver horror of never having been found out. Still, her role as a mute is bound to prove as stultifying as any other; to speed her cure, the psychiatrist suggests that Elisabeth and Alma spend a few weeks at the psychiatrist's isolated summer cottage by the sea. The two young women obediently go off together – one silent and forlorn, the other the embodiment of talkative unself-consciousness.

Now we perceive the relevance of the title of the movie, for Elisabeth and Alma are not what their personae, or masks, would lead us to believe. As the quiet days of sun and rain pass, it is Elisabeth who, for all her silence, is revealed as strong, calm, assured, and, in her letters to the psychiatrist, cruelly observant, and it is Alma who, for all her robust ways, is revealed as preoccupied with a past even more troubling to her in its meaninglessness than Elisabeth's has been to her. Meanwhile, an astonishing thing happens: in their increasing intimacy, the two young women begin to exchange personalities. For we don't simply *wear* masks; masks, Bergman implies, are what we are and perhaps all we are, and they are capable, at peril of our lives, of being changed indiscriminately and without warning. It is evident that if anyone is likely to end up sane it is Elisabeth, and if anyone is likely to end up mad it is Alma. Whether she finally does so, and the consequence is a murderous episode that actually takes place, or whether all this takes place only in fantasy is a matter presented with such a lucid and

yet shadowy tentativeness that I will have to see the movie a couple of more times before deciding which speculation to defend.

Persona is an exceptionally beautiful specimen of movie-making – one whose visual and aural satisfactions are as accessible as its basic content is obscure. It has been shot in immaculate black-and-white, and with such a regard for composition that the balance of lights and darks in a given frame is often radically upset, for non-Swedish-speaking audiences, by the presence of necessary, damnable subtitles. As one might expect, the crystal-clear, crystal-hard surface and elegant shapeliness of the movie only heighten our difficulty in coming to grips with it. What is Bergman telling us back of the story he tells? What does his impatience with the conventional means of movie storytelling signify? Does the oddity of the nature and cutting of the opening and closing sequences (including animated cartoons, shots of film spinning off the guide bars of a movieola, and shots of a camera presumably taking the very movie we are engaged in seeing) indicate that Bergman has come to share some of his younger colleagues' conviction that a movie should identify itself as such, the maker of it boldly shouldering his way into the fabric of the film and insisting that it has no validity beyond that of his own mind? Worrisome as these inquiries may be, *Persona* held me spellbound, and I urge you to let it stretch your perspicacity – and your patience – to the breaking point. Not the least of your rewards will be to behold Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann as Alma and Elisabeth; they are lovely creatures as well as accomplished actresses, and Bergman's camera does well to hover continuously within inches of their eyes and mouths, watching, watching.

GAME OF GHOSTS

P.D.Z.

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Like a demonic psychiatrist with the neurotic, postwar world on his couch, Ingmar Bergman poses painful and provocative questions but maddeningly withholds any answers. *Persona*,

his 27th film and his first since he took over full-time direction of Stockholm's Royal Dramatic Theater in 1964, is the most puzzling and provocative inquiry of them all, a story in a thousand shattering images of an actress who has withdrawn into silence and the seemingly normal nurse who goes mad talking to her. It is Bergman's "No Exit," a hell for two in which the devils of human experience are pursued and exposed but never exorcised.

Bergman's serious films always carry the air of games played in dead earnest. The rules of appearance and reality are switched, characters are mismatched to expose their weaknesses, ideas are kicked all over the screen. Bergman begins *Persona* with a wild volley of film clips – a countdown from 10 to 0, an antique cartoon of a woman washing her hands in a stream, a silent comedy strip of a skeleton pursuing a man in a nightgown. I am a world maker, Bergman is saying. That is my role. All this is artifice. And lest we forget, he interrupts his film in midstream to run these clips again.

His characters also play roles. The actress has played so many that she stops talking, hoping that in silence she can stop dissembling. But her "hopeless dream of being, not seeming, but being" leads her only to another role, that of the mute mental patient. And even this does not keep out the world. Her husband writes her loving letters, enclosing photos of her son, deformed at birth. The television set in her private room bombards her with images of burning bonzes, and the radio assaults her ear with reports of killing in Vietnam. "You can close your mouth so you don't have to play any false part," the head nurse tells her, "but life trickles in."

Her private nurse seems to be everything the actress isn't – complacent and well-adjusted, firm in her faith as a healer, content to play the role of the all-Swedish girl whose tidy life only awaits a forthcoming marriage. But as patient and nurse spend the summer isolated in a house by the barren Baltic, the roles reverse. The enforced silence of the actress makes *her* the perfect psychiatrist who listens without judging as the nurse pours out her past – an affair with a married man that has damaged her ability to love, an orgy on a beach that led to pregnancy and abortion.

Bergman robes the ritual of confession in the half-light of midsummer nights. The great, wide, beautiful faces of his women – Liv Ullmann as the actress and Bibi Andersson as the nurse –

float through the shadows like ghosts in a game of psychic tag. The identities of the women start to merge as they grow closer together. Now it is the nurse who starts to disintegrate when she finds she has mistaken silence for compassion, that the actress has been studying her clinically, just as the father in Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly* watched his daughter in search of material for a novel. The discovery in both films leads to insanity, but in *Persona,* Bergman does not simply describe it, he creates it. His medium is his message as the nurse's fantasies invade the narrative and confuse it, withdraw and return again. Always realistic but never real, they ask the viewer to sort fact from fantasy and re-create the process of mental breakdown.

The nurse's pronouncement, "I could change myself into you and you into me," becomes prophecy. She makes dream-love to the actress's husband, imagines a ritual in which she rips her arm and the actress drinks her blood. Her language breaks down into a garble of non-sentences. Finally, to rescue her sanity, she puts on her uniform, packs her gear and catches a bus back to the city.

Bergman has come full circle. The nurse has returned to her original persona to save her mind. Bergman forces us to see that every role is a false one, that we all house a collection of characters, all of them equally fraudulent. The dilemma is clear but the rest is silence.

SWEDISH SUMMER

PAULINE KAEL

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There is a brief passage in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* – Bibi Andersson tells about a day and night of sex – that is so much more erotic than all of *Ulysses* that it demonstrates what *can* be done on the screen with told material. We do not need to see images of the beach and the boy and the return to the fiancée that she describes because the excitement is in how she tells it. Bergman has the capacity to create images that set off reverberations: in the early part of *Illicit Interlude* an old woman appears for

just a moment on a road – walking – and this image, like the croquet game in *Smiles of a Summer Night,* seems to be suspended in time. In moments like these, Bergman is a great artist. In *Persona* Bibi Andersson's almost fierce revery has that kind of beauty. As she goes on talking, with memories of summer and nakedness and pleasure in her words and the emptiness of her present in her face, we begin to hold our breath in fear that Bergman can't sustain this almost intolerably difficult sequence. But he does, and it builds and builds and is completed. It's one of the rare, truly erotic sequences on film.

Bergman's movies have almost always had some kind of show within the show: a ballet, a circus, a magic show, a bit of animation, many pieces of plays and even whole plays. In *Persona,* as in the very early *Prison,* Bergman involves us in the making of a movie. He gives us a movie within a movie, but he seems hardly to have made the *enclosing* movie, and then he throws away the inner movie. (I thought I even *felt* it go – at the repeated passage, when the director seems to be trying an alternate way of shooting a sequence.) It's a pity because the inner movie had begun to involve us in marvelous possibilities: an actress (Liv Ullmann) who has abandoned the power of speech is put in the care of a nurse (Bibi Andersson); and the nurse, like an analysand who becomes furious at the silence of the analyst, begins to vent her own emotional disturbances. In the dramatic material the women don't change identity; it is merely their roles that change as the nurse become hysterical and uncontrollable. But the two look very much alike, and Bergman plays with this resemblance photographically by suggestive combinations and superimpositions.

Most movies give so little that it seems almost barbarous to object to Bergman's not giving us more in *Persona,* but it is just because of the expressiveness and fascination of what we are given that the movie is so frustrating. Though it's possible to offer interpretations, I don't think that treating *Persona* as the pieces of a puzzle and trying to put them together will do much more than demonstrate ingenuity at guesswork. It's easy to say that the little boy reaching up to the screen is probably Bergman as a child; and he may also represent the nurse's aborted baby and/or the actress's rejected son. But for this kind of speculation (and one would have to go through almost every image in the movie this way) to have

any purpose, there must be a structure of meanings in the work by which an interpretation can be validated; I don't think there is one in *Persona.* If there is, it is so buried that it doesn't function in the work. We respond to the image of the little boy – not because he's Bergman or an abortion but simply in terms of the quality and intensity of the image – but we don't know why it's in this film.

It may be that an open puzzle movie like this one, which affects some people very profoundly, permits them to project into it so much of themselves that what they think the movie is about has very little to do with what happens on the screen. This kind of projection – which we used to think of as the pre-critical responsiveness of the mass audience – is now common in the educated audience. People can be heard saying that they "didn't worry about whether it was good or bad," they "just let it happen to them." And if the educated audience is now coming around to the larger audience's way of seeing movies, I would suggest that they are also being sold in the same way as the larger audience, that advertising and the appearance of critical consensus it gives to certain movies are what lead people to "let" certain prestigious movies "happen to them," just as the larger audience lets an epic musical spoof like *Thoroughly Modern Millie* happen to them. The idea is that "art" should be experienced, not criticized. There seems to be little sense that critical faculties are involved in experience, and that if they are not involved, advertising determines what is accepted as art.

BERGMAN REDIVIVUS

JOHN SIMON

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After seeing Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* twice, I still cannot be sure that I understand it. What I am sure of, however, is that something difficult and elusive is struggling to gain form and recognition here; that, unlike in a film such as *Accident,* the complexity and obscurity are unavoidable, and not merely gratuitous

mock-profundities. Never before on film has the derailed psyche been more penetratingly examined, never before has the drama been played so consistently beneath the surface, yet without the slightest sacrifice in palpable excitement. The whole film appears to be shot from inside out: The tormented and tormenting soul is not so much viewed as allowed to express its own views, to impress us with its awesomely human inhumanity.

The film begins with a mysterious sequence of unrelated images. Inside a projector, a film runs off the sprockets; scenes from old-fashioned cartoon and Keystone Kops comedy; inner organs being pulled from a sheep; a spider in extreme closeup; a nail being hammered into a hand; various winter landscapes, including a picket fence. Then what seems to be a morgue: the sound of water (or formaldehyde?) dripping; an old man, a crone, a boy laid out and covered with sheets. A telephone rings. The boy curls up as in a womb, but is forced to awaken. He puts on glasses and starts reading *A Hero of Our Time.* A woman's face begins to appear to him, in and out of focus, on a translucent wall or screen. He stretches his hand toward the apparition, but her eyes close and she fades out. Now the story begins.

Bergman himself has said about *Persona,* "On many points I am unsure, and in one instance, at least, I know nothing." There is a certain "subjectivity" or "arbitrariness" in the scenes included: "For this reason I invite the audience's fantasy to dispose freely of what I have put at its disposal." It seems to me that those initial images represent the pitifully limited efforts of art (film) to grasp reality; then diverse forms of fear, cruelty, loneliness, including the spider-God of Bergman's Trilogy. Then the final isolation, death – non-being out of which we are summoned into life. Again art (Lermontov) is to teach us how to live heroically, but unheroic we (bespectacled) reach out to the *Ewig-Weibliche* woman, for help. She eludes us; her eyes close in grief or exhaustion.

Persona concerns a young nurse, Alma, who is to look after Elisabeth Vogler, a famous actress who has lapsed into absolute silence. A woman psychiatrist tells Alma that the patient's mind and body are perfectly sound, but that she simply stopped speaking after a performance of *Electra.* Different explanations suggest themselves. We see Mrs. Vogler in her hospital room in anguish as she watches on the TV screen a Buddhist monk's fiery self-immo-

lation – what is the death of one Agamemnon to the horror of Vietnam? From a letter from Elisabeth's husband that Alma reads out loud to her, we learn that something has gone deeply wrong with that marriage. As emerges from an admonitory speech of the woman doctor, Elisabeth may simply be essaying yet another role: Finding it impossible to be real, she prefers to sham muteness. Thus her condition may be caused by the inflamed world, the cooling of the flesh, or by an artful devil within, a devil connected with her art.

That Elisabeth is to be taken as a symbol of the artist is confirmed by the fact that she is called Vogler (*i.e.,* fowler) like the hero of Bergman's *The Magician,* who more manifestly embodies the artist. Like Vogler in that film, she too is first seen in a black wig (for Electra) and then in her natural blonde hair. Like the Magician, Elisabeth is an equivocal figure: There is good but also considerable falsity in her. And her silence is evil – just as in Bergman's *The Silence,* non-communication, however innocent-seeming, is always bad. Significantly, when a romantic play reaches Elisabeth over her radio, she laughs; when she hears some austerely classical music, she is close to weeping. The possibilities of communication seem to begin where the word ends. But has the word failed us, or we the word?

The woman doctor sends Alma and Elisabeth off to her seaside villa for what is to be a therapeutic summer. The two young women take to each other, communicate even through shared aestival experiences, but Elisabeth persists in her speechlessness. Alma (the name may come from the Latin "nourishing, bountiful," or from the Celtic "all good") confides more and more in Elisabeth. Is this therapy, friendship, or, as Alma in a later desperate moment fears, exhibitionism? She tells the alertly, indeed avidly listening actress about her first unhappy love affair, about her current engagement to a decent but plodding fellow who considers her a "sleepwalker," of her work which she enjoys and hopes to go on with.

She also tells Elisabeth about an incident on a beach where she and a highly-sexed girl sunbathed naked and were observed by two very young boys. They seduced the boys and even passed them on to each other, Alma experiencing the greatest sexual satisfaction of her life. An abortion resulted, about which she still

feels guilty. Barely perceptibly, Alma and Elisabeth begin to merge. First it is their clothes that progressively resemble each other; then we see shots of them in which their bodies seem to fuse. Later there are little hugs and similar endearments. Then comes a nocturnal scene during which Alma repeats aloud some affectionately cautionary whispers of Elisabeth's, thinking the words her own. It could be a dream but it isn't: almost completely alike in their diaphanous nightgowns, the two women merge in an embrace. Next morning, Elisabeth denies everything with a shake of her head.

Alma reads a letter of Elisabeth's she is supposed to mail; she learns that the actress is really having fun with her, studying her as a subject for her art. There follows a series of fights and reconciliations in the course of which Alma manages to make Elisabeth step barefoot on a potsherd (a beautifully staged scene), Elisabeth bloodies Alma's nose, Alma threatens to throw scalding water in Elisabeth's face and elicits a screamed "No, don't!" after which the silence resumes even thicker. There is a scene in which Alma runs barefoot over rocks after Elisabeth, pleading and humbling herself. Unforgiven, she lapses into a terrifying dream.

In this dream Alma begins by asserting her superiority over Elisabeth. The latter's husband, blind in the dream, arrives and makes love to Alma, thinking her his wife, as Elisabeth abets and watches. The crypto-lesbian experience with the boys on the beach assumes a deeper meaning. Alma, who awake kept asserting her insignificance vis-à-vis the great actress, now transcends her. In a frightening scene, Alma tells Elisabeth how she, the actress, tried to avoid maternity but, trapped into it, proceeded to make her boy an emotional cripple. To illustrate that this is sheer projection, as well as insane identification with the other, Bergman gives us the scene twice: first focusing on the (guiltily or innocently?) cowering actress, then on the malignly triumphant nurse. Thereupon the two women's faces contract into a split but single tortured countenance.

Alma suffers a frightening breakdown in her dream: She talks nonsense (in which, however, the blending of egos is implicit), beats a table and then Elisabeth, rends her own arm and gets the wound sucked by the actress – samaritanism or vampirism? She

even implacably forces Elisabeth to repeat after her the word "Nothing" – giving her speech only to take away meaning.

In the morning, the women, silent and hostile, pack their respective bags. Alma puts on her uniform again and we see her catch a bus back to town. We don't see Elisabeth leave, but there is a shot of her playing Electra again. Does this mean that, cured, she resumes her work? But it is the same shot we saw when we were told of her breakdown. It may thus be a mere flashback, saying that her abdication continues. And Alma? Can she go back to her old life as if nothing had happened? And why do we see only Alma leaving? Could the entire tale have taken place in Alma's mind – was there only one person all along, assuming various "personas," *i.e.,* actor's masks? At this point the film once again jumps off the sprockets, as it did also after the first big quarrel between the women, suggesting that art cannot resolve this problem: Life is too much for it.

Sven Nykvist's cinematography – I think black-and-white photography can achieve no greater heights – manages to abolish the boundaries between dream and waking. Liv Ullmann's actress and, even more so, Bibi Andersson's nurse, are overwhelming characterizations, the one making silence, the other chitchat, supremely eloquent. Bergman's dialogue, rhythms, and *mise en scene* – the hospital, all vacuous white austerity; the seaside, beautiful yet also harsh; only the women, with their jolly day-clothes, frilly nightwear, or dreamily mingling blondness generating ephemeral warmth – are masterly every stop of the arduous way.

I can only guess at the ultimate meaning. The artist and the ordinary human being need each other, but this is a love-hate, a fight for absolute power over the other. Their complete communion is illusory and painful – only a dream, a nightmare – yet also real enough, perhaps, to mark them both. Life and art batten on each other, art sucking life's blood, life trying to cajole or bully art into submission, into becoming its mirror. The result of the strife is madness, whether feigned or real hardly matters. Relatives, lovers, friends, all who are sucked into this conflict, suffer along with the principal combatants. The end is, at best, a draw. And, with luck, a magnificent film.

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